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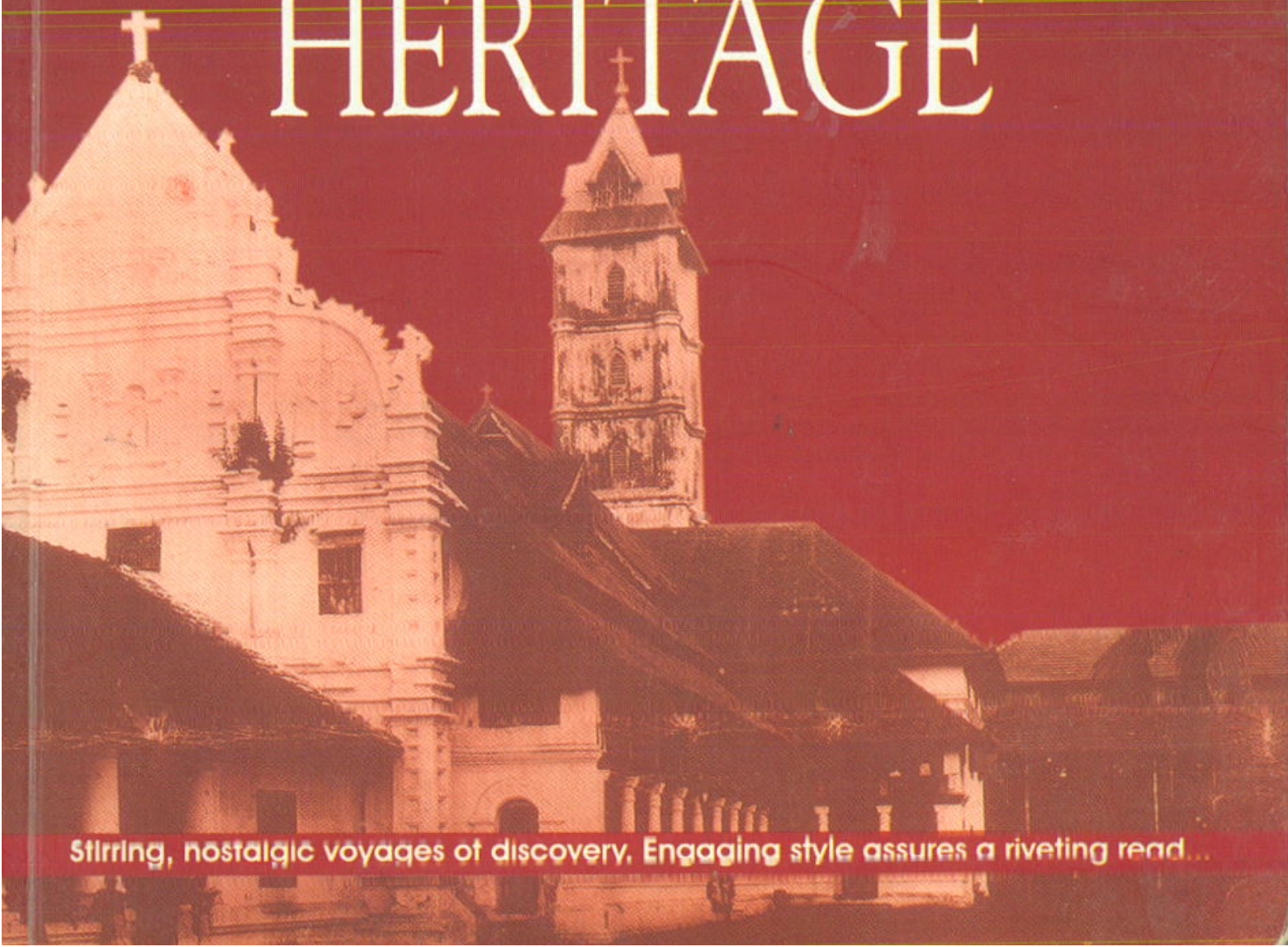

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THE ST. THOMAS CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF INDIA

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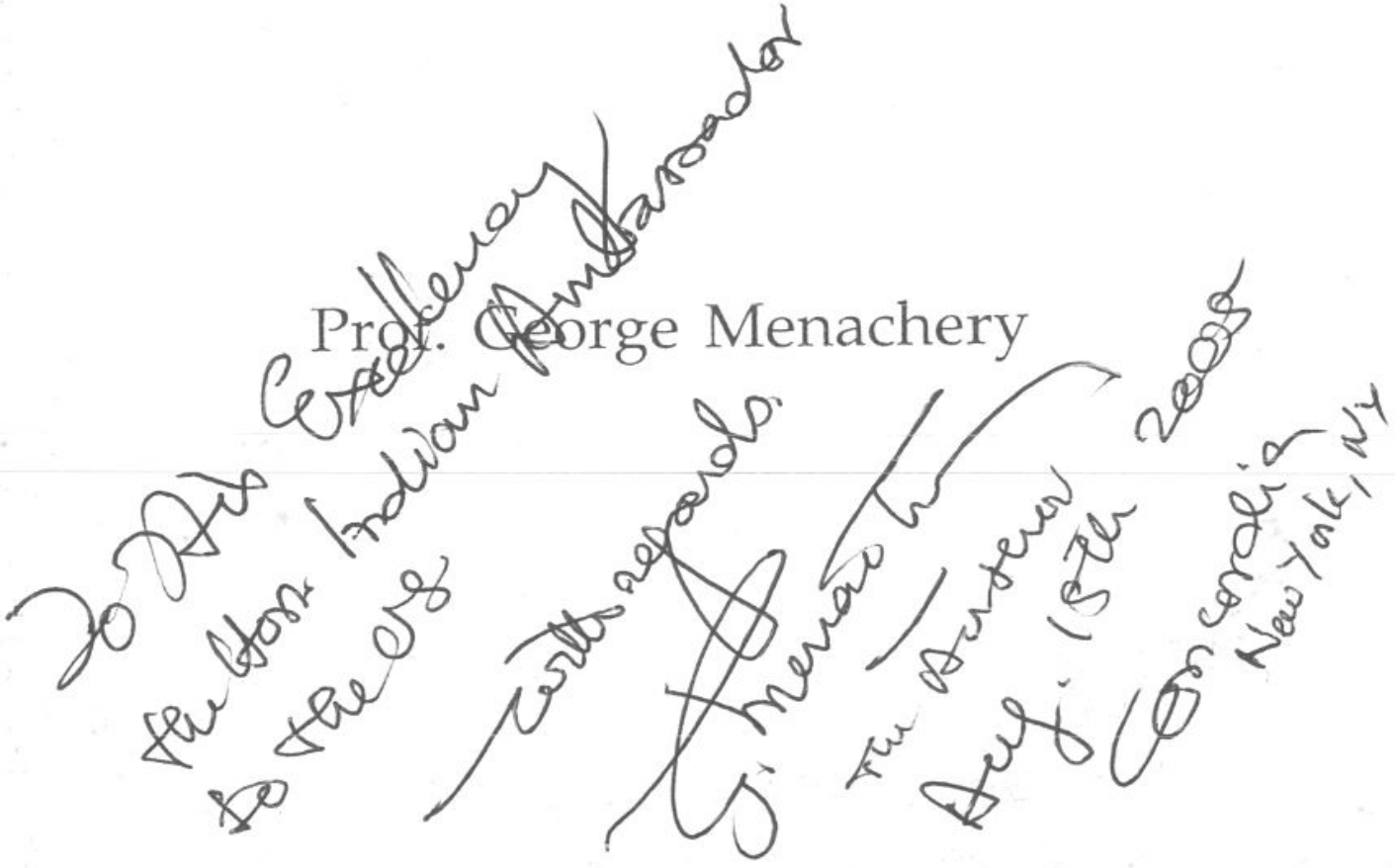
Nazraney Heritage

Prof. George Menachery



Glimpses of Nazraney Heritage

Prof. George Menachery

SARAS
2005

Glimpses of Nazraney Heritage

By Prof. George Menachery

A **SARAS** BOOK

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From the publisher's desk

Ever since Prof. Menachery started to cogitate in earnest on his own cultural roots, especially after the National Seminar *Church in India Today* (1969) he happened upon many aspects of Thomas Christian history and culture which were either novel or not taken sufficiently seriously by earlier scholars. Parallel to his work on the *Thomas Encyclopaedia* (1970 onwards) and the *Church History Classics* he has been trying to expose these findings at innumerable seminars and workshops; through exhibitions and museums; in souvenirs and commemoration volumes. Most of his seminar papers have gone through many lives - he is an expert cut and paste artist - the same papers appearing with meagre changes and a few additional paragraphs or notes, before different scholarly groups, thus providing the thoughts maximum exposure from one end of the country to the other. He was extremely reluctant to give his papers for publication in a book form, as he could not decide which version to print. This led us to wade through many journals and approach seminar organizers and fellow-participants for copies or tapes of his papers. By a generous use of Prof. Menachery's favorite technique of "redaction" we have put together this little volume. The great amount of fresh thinking and discussion generated in the last three or four decades by his media contributions and the small books *Pallikkalakalum Mattum* and *Kodungallur City of St. Thomas* emboldens us to bring out this little collection.

The valuable, informative, and instructive "Introduction" by Professor M.G.S.Narayanan is gratefully acknowledged.

The author Prof. George Menachery was born at Kattur on April 2, 1938. Mother: Puthenpura Kunjuvareed Kunjethy. Father: Erinjery Thoma Kochouseph. Wife: Vazhapilly Kochuvareed Maggie. After teaching university classes for thirty years he gave up the job as Head of the Department of Post-Graduate Teaching in order to concentrate on research and publication. At present he spends some time every year as Professor of Christian Art at the Pontifical Institute, Alwaye, and teaching at other theology colleges in India.

Connected with many institutions and organizations interested in the study of history and culture, he was executive member of the Kerala History Association (1975-90), Kerala Government Advisory Board of Archaeology (1975-82), University Senate, University Statutory Finance Committee, Kerala Sahitya Academy, expert committee of the Government of India Census Directorate (Kerala)...

He was also the national vice-president of the Newman Association of India-Pax Romana (1964-72), founder director of the Institute for Lay Leadership Training (1967-2004), founder director and curator of the Diocesan Christian Cultural Museum (from 1980), member of the (Arch) diocesan Pastoral Council (1978 - the present), president of Kalasadan (1984-1992), founder president of the Kerala Historical Research Society,...He has to his credit a large number of publications, research papers, articles, radio talks and TV programmes. His research activities and lectures have taken him abroad often, to more than 22 countries in 4 continents. At present he is engrossed in the work of completing the Christian Encyclopaedia, *and the* Church History Classics, *and in setting up a comprehensive Indian Christian Museum. While not travelling in connection with one of these projects he is to be found at the ancestral family seat in Ollur, browsing in his huge library of rare books and collection of artefacts or pottering around the orchard. Detective stories and* Parippu Vada *are (still) major weaknesses.*

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Introduction

Professor M.G.S.Narayanan

Here on my table is a collection of essays on the Christian heritage of Kerala, written by my scholarly friend, Professor George Menachery, who spent many years in the study of the church - its history, legends, arts, architecture and literature. Since he is primarily interested in social and cultural history, the theological, economic and political aspects of the Christian heritage do not figure prominently in these writings.

He is well known to the academic world as the Chief Editor of St. Thomas Encyclopedia and other books that presented for the first time a comprehensive picture of the Syrian Christian community that forms an influential sector of society in Kerala. The volumes of the encyclopedia gathered information from different, often obscure, sources and brought together the knowledge and expertise of numerous writers in a presentable form. It is an achievement of global significance as it offers an authoritative reference book for all who are interested in Christians and Christianity of India. The rich experience in the preparation of those volumes enabled this English professor to make excursions into archaeology, numismatics and art history related to Christian life. That this book is one of those byproducts must be evident from the amplitude of references that enhance the value of the essays in a big way. It may also be observed that he is up to date in this field as he mentions the latest findings of the current year on the location of the ancient harbour town of Muciri or Muziris made by the young archaeologists of the Centre for Heritage Studies in Tripunithura. (p.71) He has carefully gone through and digested much of the relevant literature on the subjects of his choice.

However, I have to confess that as a historian I find his obsession with the St. Thomas legend in its present form unacceptable. This legend crops up suddenly in Kerala in the 16th century, but there is absolutely no mention of it in the early literature of Kerala or the rest of the Christian world. The Syrian and other European versions of the life story of Apostle Thomas have no reference to his direct connection with this part of India, though they mention his eastward journey and encounter with king Gondophorus whose coins have been found in the North Western parts of India. Moreover, the contents of the legend also betray the late origin, as there was no Ceraman Perumal at Kodungallur until the 9th century, and the Brahmins who are supposed to have been converted by the saint did not occupy a prominent place in the Kerala social set up until that time.

In the first essay with the catchy title 'Christianity is Older than Hinduism in Kerala', the Professor seems to identify Vedic Brahmanism as Hinduism. This is a mistake popularized by the Western scholars of the colonial era. He is not perhaps aware of the fact that Kerala was an integral part of Tamilakam in the Sangam Age that certainly goes back to the Mauryan period before the Christian era, as Asoka has referred to the Tamil rulers including Kerala Putra. The earliest poems of the Sangam are permeated with the Dravidian or Tamil cults that form part of the Hindu culture. What the author probably intended was that Christianity had established a foothold in the harbour towns of Kerala before the temple-oriented Brahmanical creed had gained ascendancy in society. This assumption cannot be justified because we have the earliest evidence of Christian presence only in the 8th century with the Persian crosses. It is true that Christian traders could have been familiar with the Kerala coast even earlier, but this is true also in the case of the native cults that were popular in the countryside. They were brought under Brahmanical influence later, but Brahinization remained partial and incomplete. In fact there were large numbers of non-Brahmins among the local Christians and they continued their caste practices even after conversion

to Christianity. Several clauses in the Synod of Diamper have been framed to prevent them from using traditional names and rituals, and worshipping old images.

The early Christians who arrived in Kerala could have been the followers of St. Thomas the Apostle who worked in Syria and Persia. It is natural that they were proud of their connection with the Apostle, and retained his name in their folk memory, but that does not mean that the Apostle himself came to Kerala. At any rate, such claims about Brahmanical origin and conversion directly by the Apostle, that are in conflict with all historical evidence, are flaunted often to promote snobbery and notions of caste pride. It is also likely that in course of time the memory of another leader called Thomas came to be confused with that of the Apostle.

In fact the early Christians did not even undertake the mission to convert others. That was done by the European missionaries of the colonial age. The involvement of early Christians in trade and court politics cannot be underestimated, but their interaction with other locals had been peaceful and friendly, for many centuries. They behaved as loyal subjects of the native rulers and good neighbors of the Hindu population. This is demonstrated by the Syrian copper plates of the 9th century and several records of later times. As a result, they enjoyed the titles and privileges usually associated with aristocratic Nayars. They even resisted the attempts of the Portuguese to force them to follow the Roman church, as illustrated by the Koonen Cross episode.

Barring the obsession with the St. Thomas legend, these essays offer very good material for students of Kerala history. For example the first essay itself contains much new information, culled out from recent researches, about the advent of Brahmins in Kerala, and the distribution of their settlements. Though the second essay is also concerned with the legitimation of the St. Thomas legend, it carries authentic data on the discovery of the early Roman coins in Kerala in places like Eyyal, Kottayam, Valluvalli, Mala,

Paravur etc. based on archaeological reports in the state. The third essay deals with several customs of the Kerala Christians and other communities. However, the author has made a mistake in referring to Adi Sankara as the lawgiver who formulated the caste regulations of Kerala. Sankara lived in the 8th-9th centuries while the *Sankara Smriti*, which deals with the rules, belongs to later period, probably in 17th century of the Christian era. The author could have been one of the later Sankaras of Kerala.

Incidentally there is an observation of the author that attracted my attention, and I think it is worth quoting here. "Kerala Christians have been world citizens even before other parts of India became even aware of the existence of the existence of other cultures and other religions." (p.50) There is an element of over simplification and exaggeration in this statement, obviously meant to attract the common reader, but it is true that Kerala Christians were not only well-integrated with the rest of society, but were instrumental in creating new links with the Western world including the far-flung territories of their empire in the modern age. Though India was in touch with the Islamic world in the medieval period, but the Kerala Christians who looked westwards for inspiration were the pioneers in creating global diaspora. They were welcomed in large numbers by the Europeans and Americans in their homelands and their colonies in Africa and Australia, and they made themselves at home everywhere. Professor Menachery could perhaps have incorporated a section on the European missionaries whose proselytizing work had a positive as well as a negative side - their schools and colleges, patronized by the native and British rulers, went a long way in preparing Christians and others for world citizenship. They contributed through the imparting of linguistic and industrial skills, and above all the formation of a mental make up suitable for all kinds of foreign enterprise.

The fourth essay gives an elaborate account of the granite objects associated with the early churches in Kerala. To

me this appeared to be the most original and useful contribution, because these are never taken up for discussion, and often ignored as being of no great consequence. The flights of steps in granite leading to the church, the granite crosses with lotus and peacock motifs carved on them, the obelisks, the granite lamp stands, flagstaff, sculptured baptismal fonts etc. are typical of the early churches. It is interesting to note that the use of granite in construction started in Kerala by about the 8th or 9th century A.D. in the case of Brahmanical temples. It became widespread in the age of the Ceraman Perumals, between the 9th and 12th centuries, but the huge dated granite flagstaffs in front of Brahmanical temples belong to the 16th-17th centuries. A typological study of this material and comparison with their temple counterparts may yield interesting clues about their construction.

The fifth essay on Palayur church provides a survey of the geographical background of the evolution of Kerala society and some observations of outsiders from Marco Polo to Logan. Legends and songs related to Palayur, one of the early Christian centers, have been collected. Place names and family names are discussed. An old Jewish centre is also mentioned. While all this is useful to the historian, he must guard himself against the temptation to accept the chronology suggested by the legends, as they are notorious for the lack of time sense. They remain to be studied in the light of architecture and sculpture, graveyard inscriptions and pottery from small-scale excavations that can be organized easily with permission from the churches. The real obstacle for such a program so far has been the attitude of the church authorities who rely too much on legends and fear the results of scientific investigation. I remember Professor Hambye who announced at the History Congress in Benares (1969) that he was planning to excavate St. Thomas Mount in Chennai. Professor K.V. Raman, Head of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, offered to co-operate on behalf of the University of Madras, and I did the same on behalf of the University of Calicut. He would

have nothing of that, and carried out his plan in secrecy, with the result that his findings remain suspect in the eyes of academics in India.

I can understand the sentimental problems of Christian scholars in view of long-standing beliefs and issues of family prestige, real or imaginary. This is a common stumbling block everywhere, but the Western societies have overcome such difficulties and asserted the primacy of research in the field of history, even when it deals with the Bible. We in India have also succeeded to a large extent in the case of Indian History, but where it comes to the question of religious texts and institutions, - Hindu, Muslim or Christian - we are stuck with legends and tales. We have to come out of it some day, and sooner the better for India.

I can also understand my friend's weakness for the St. Thomas story. He is deeply in love with the Christian heritage in all its manifold aspects, and everything about it fascinates him. It is well known that love is blind, and it affects the critical faculty adversely. However, it is this love that has enabled him to do so much in the field of church history in Kerala, bringing together scholars and facts, and placing them before the world in presentable style. In this activity he is following in the footsteps of T.K.Joseph who published the Kerala Society Papers in several volumes. While welcoming this book as a new addition to the treasure house of knowledge accumulated by Professor George Menachery, I wish and pray that he will also be able to come forward and break the spell of legends, which stand in the way of critical assessment of all the assembled materials relating to the Christian heritage, which is an invaluable part of the cultural heritage of Kerala.

'Maitri', Calicut-9
14 December 2004

Essay One

Christianity Older than Hinduism in Kerala

When it is suggested that Christianity is older than Hinduism in Kerala it is quite likely that much may be argued in favour of the opposite view, as it has been argued, in place and out of place, by many, down the decades of the past century or two. Only there is something to be said against the stand often taken for granted that Hinduism was here in Kerala from time immemorial, and that Christianity here was the late-comer, "and that is what, on the present occasion, I have to say".[1] As Stevenson goes on to say, to state one argument is not necessarily to be deaf to all others.[2] All the same the title "Christianity Older than Hinduism in Kerala," even if it appears like an Irish bull[3] or ludicrous inconsistency in speech, in truth only states a fact, a fact often well understood by scholars of Kerala History, but generally not honestly admitted or boldly stated. It may even be that the Syriac script and liturgy - surely the Pahlavi script - were in Kerala much before the Devanagari and the Vedas

found their foothold here. In spite of the many statements in *Keralolpathy* most historians today believe that the Parasurama story is only a legend and Brahmins arrive in Kerala for all practical purposes only in the 4th century or later, and the Brahmins or Namboodiris establish dominance only around the end of the first millennium C.E. In the time available for this paper it will be possible merely to have a passing glance at some facets of the problem, and that too in a most cursory manner.

To commence with, it may be useful to examine a few definitions / descriptions of the terms Hindu and Hinduism. "Hinduism is the religion of the Hindus, the people of Hindusthan. The land lying to the east of the river Sindhu was called Hindusthan by the Persians, the word Sindhu being pronounced by them Hindu. Thus the name Hinduism is geographical in origin."[4] Even today the river Sindhu for the westerner is the Indus. In this sense "Hinduism is a western term for religious beliefs and practices of most of the peoples in India"[5] referring to almost everything in the land or lands across the Indus sometimes even up to China.[6] In this broad sense Kerala formed a part of India and thus could be considered Hindu from the first century onwards (cf. the first century B.C./A.D. writings of Roman authors like Pliny,[7] which author calls Muziris *primum emporium Indiae*). It is possible that many Greek and Roman writers when they spoke of India had mainly Kerala in their mind.[8] In this geographical sense of Hinduism, and only in that sense, was Kerala the abode of Hindus and Hinduism from the earliest centuries.

However there is another definition for Hinduism. "It (i.e. Hindu) is not a very ancient name, for it is not found in any of the early literatures. The original name for it (Hinduism) was Sanatana-Dharma, meaning the Eternal Religion. It is so named because it is based on certain eternal principles, beliefs and practices. Another name for it is Vaidika-Dharma, the religion derived from the Vedas. In this sense it is also known as Brahmana-Dharma, Brahma here standing for the Vedas."[9] Vedic Hinduism, i.e. the religion now considered Hinduism, does not have a very long history in Kerala. In fact Vedic Hinduism in Kerala is not as old as Christianity in Kerala.

Before proceeding further, for a clearer understanding of what is today understood by Hinduism, let us examine the rest of the modern description of Hinduism earlier quoted: [I RUSH THRU THIS PART] For the religious beliefs and practices of most of the people of India the "Corresponding Indian term is *dharma* [law]. It has no fixed scriptural canon, but Veda, Brahmanas, and Bhagavad-Gita have elaborate theological commentary. Brahmanism substituted (c.550 B.C.) for Vedic religion a complex system of ritual and theosophy expounded in Brahmanas and Upanishads. Brahmanas regulate sacrifices to gods and personify moral qualities. Upanishads, foundation of modern Hindu philosophy, develop doctrine of a universal soul or being to which individual souls will be reunited after *maya* (illusion of time and space) is conquered. Buddhism and Jainism, which flourished from c.300 B.C. to A.D. c.400 in India, attacked this complex ritual and theology. However, Brahmanism adopted features of those religions and

codified its own ritual in Laws of Manu. Several schools of interpretation of Upanishads appeared and Yoga was developed. A later stage of Hinduism is represented by Tantras and Puranas. Tantras are mainly prescriptions for securing divine favour; Puranas comprise poems addressed mainly to Siva (or Shiva) the Destroyer and Vishnu the Preserver. These and Brahma, a remote deity who created the universe and is equated with it, form triad at center of modern Hinduism."[10]

Even much before the nineteen-seventies historians were fully convinced that Vedic Hinduism and the Brahmins must have arrived in Kerala only much later than the first centuries A.D. The extensive studies made by Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan, the then head of the department of history at the University of Calicut, and at present (until recently) the chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) together with Dr. Veluthat Kesavan, now head of the department of history, Mangalore University, shed much light on the beginnings of the Brahmin community in Kerala. Here it is important to note what Dr. Narayanan says concerning the new trends in Kerala Historical studies: "Historical research had a delayed start in Kerala in the absence of History Departments in the University until the sixties of the last (20th) century. This gave the opportunity for interest groups to popularize their pet ideas and pass them on as authentic history. They had come to associate these myths with their own status and privileges. Once the community leaders and political leaders published their 'theories' about ancient history, their followers developed a frame of mind that resisted interpretations based on evidence. With the

establishment of History Departments in the Universities it was possible for the present writer and his colleagues to build upon the foundations laid by Professor Elamkulam, sometimes extending and modifying the conclusions, sometimes demolishing and re-building too. This introduction becomes necessary because it is often found even today that the discussion of problems in ancient history are cluttered and obstructed or vitiated by earlier legendary notions which have been thrown out and exposed long ago with the availability of contemporary evidence."[11]

To understand the origin and spread of Brahmins or Namboodiris in Kerala let us go through the words of Dr. Kesavan Veluthat in some detail: "The Brahmans of Kerala are known as Nambudiris. Historical evidences as well as their own traditions suggest that they came from North India and settled down in Kerala, migrating along the West Coast. It is clear that they constitute links in a long chain of migration along the West Coast of India, carrying with them the tradition that Parasurama created their land and donated it to them. In fact, one sees this tradition all along the West Coast from Sourashtra on; and the Brahmanical tradition in the Canarese and Malabar Coasts is nearly identical to one another. According to that tradition, Parasurama created the land between Gokarna and Kanyakumari and settled Brahmans there in sixty-four *Gramas* or "villages". As a result, the Brahmans of Kerala share several common features with the Brahmans of the Canarese coast; this also distinguishes them from their counterparts in the rest of South India. In a historical inquiry, this is extremely important. What

is necessary is not to look for the place of their origin or the identity and date of Parasurama but to ascertain the social function of such a tradition and examine the extent of linkages between the two regions and their cultures. It is stated that thirty-two out of the sixty-four *Gramas* are in the Tulu speaking region and the remaining thirty-two in the Malayalam speaking region in Kerala. Recent historical research has identified these settlements on either side of the border. Those in Kerala proper are listed in the *Keralolpatti*, the narrative of Kerala history. They are: a) Between rivers Perumpuzha and Karumanpuzha:1. Payyannur, 2. Perumchellur, 3. Alattiyur, 4. Karantola, 5. Cokiram, 6. Panniyur, 7. Karikkatu, 8. Isanamangalam, 9. Trissivaperur, 10. Peruvanam. b) Between rivers Karumanpuzha and Churni: 11. Chamunda, 12. Irungatikkutal, 13. Avattiputtur, 14. Paravur, 15. Airanikkalam, 16. Muzhikkalam, 17. Kuzhavur, 18. Atavur, 19. Chenganatu, 20. Ilibhyam, 21. Uliyannur, 22. Kazhutanatu. c) Between river Churni and Kanya Kumari: 23. Errumanur, 24. Kumaranallur, 25. Katamaruku, 26. Aranmula, 27. Tiruvalla, 28. Kitangur, 29. Chengannur, 30. Kaviyur, 31. Venmani and 32. Nirmanna. Of these, most survive today with the continuing Brahmanical traditions and the structural temples known as *Gramakshetras*. Many find mention in the epigraphical records dating from the ninth century and a few are mentioned in literature. Moreover, every Nambudiri house claims to belong to one or the other of these thirty-two settlements in Kerala. The historicity of the *Grama* affiliation of the Nambudiris, therefore, cannot be doubted. It is possible

that *these (Brahman) settlements came up between the third and ninth centuries of the Christian era,*[12] i.e., the close of the early historical period in the history of South India, which historians describe as the "Sangam Age", and the establishment of the Chera kingdom of Mahodayapuram."[13]

And Dr. M. G. S. Narayanan concurs: "This situation helps us to confirm that *the ancestors of present day Nambudiris established their temple-centred Gramas in the span of the 8th-9th centuries.*[14] As the Brahmins in the historical epochs have always been clan-conscious and conservative, they must have been Brahmins by birth only. They are found to have followed the laws of Dharmasastra texts according to the internal epigraphic evidence. There is no question of conversion of non-Brahmins or the recruitment of non-Brahmins as Brahmins into the Brahmin fold, as these practices are foreign to Dharmasastra literature. As we know from the contemporary records that these Brahmins had brought all the paraphernalia of the Vedic-Sastric-Puranic Brahminism of the Gangetic valley, they could not have been indigenous to Kerala."[15]

The above authorities incontrovertibly establish the fact that Brahmins and Brahminism along with Vedic Hinduism arrive in Kerala only many centuries later than the commencement of the Christian era. The Nairs, who belong to the Chaturvarna or four castes, though they form the lowest rung of the caste system as they are Sudras, appear on the scene even much later than the Brahmins, perhaps as late as the 12th century C.E. Centuries before there is any trace of Vedic Hinduism in Kerala there are many well established

evidences for the existence of Christians in Kerala. Christianity would appear to be the oldest existing religion in Kerala, much older than any other present day organized religion including of course Islam.

Vigrahas or images of Vedic Hindu gods and goddesses appear in Kerala much later than the rock crosses.[16] Even at the Salem, Erode portions of the Chera Kingdom and the Venad, Kanyakumari sector they appear only mostly after the 9th century. In fact all the Vigrahas or images of Hindu gods and goddesses appearing anywhere in Kerala are datable to a period much later than the time of the Pahlavi crosses of St. Thomas Mount, Kottayam (two numbers), Kadamattom, Muttuchira, and Alangad.

For example, according to the studies published by K. V. Soundararajan, Director, Archaeology Survey of India, 1978 the Vigraha of Aja Eka Pada first appears in Thondamandalam in the 8th C., in Cholamandalam in the 11th C., in Pandimandalam in the 13th C. ArdhaNareeswara appears in S. India only after the 7th C. and in Kerala only after the 9th C. AnanthaShayi: South India 6th C. and Kerala 8th C. DakshinaMoorthy: Kerala 8th C. Ganesha: Kerala 8th C. Harihara: Kerala 11th C. Jvarahareshvara: 13th C. Jeshta: 11th C. Lingothbhava: Post-11th C. SapthaMatha: 14th C. TriMoorthy: 8th C.[17] Oldest Hindu idols of Kerala are found in areas outside our present Kerala, beyond the ghats in Kongunadu from Salem-Dharmapuri or beyond Trivandrum. This would mean that in central Kerala the homeland of most of the ancient Christians Hindu images appear even later. The oldest Hindu and even Buddhist statues of Kerala

are attributed to the 9thC or later by Dr. M.G. S. Narayanan also.[18] Hence of all the rock images in existence in Kerala the Pahlavi crosses are much older than any Hindu *Vigraha* or idol.[19]

One might here genuinely ask about the existence of innumerable reasonably old temples in Kerala, and temple festivals. Most of these temples are Kavus dedicated to Bhagavathy or an ancient mother-goddess. The well-known Trichur Pooram festival, for example, is only a get-together of a dozen Bhagavathies, and Shiva or Vadakkumnathan has nothing whatsoever to do with it, although the festivities take place around the Vadakkunnathan or Shiva temple. The Thidambu or image in gold or silver carried by the elephants depict only or chiefly the Bhagavathy of Paramekkavu, Thiruvambady etc. and there is no proper Hindu god or goddess honoured during these festivals.

Any discussion of Hindu origins and development, especially w.r.t. Kerala, would be quite inadequate without reference to Adi Sankara, the great reformer, teacher, scholar, and author. Sankaracharya flouri-shed ca. 8th C.C.E. or in the first century before or after the commencement of the Malayalam or Kollam Era in 825 C.E. The great sage was born at Kalady, or at Veliyanadu on the opposite shore of the river in his mother's house. In either case he was born in the midst of a great Christian population affiliated to churches established many centuries before his birth at nearby places like Malayattoor, Angamaly, Parur, Edappally &c. on the river banks of Churni or the Periyar [*STCEI*, II, 1973, p. 178<e, f]. How far his life and thoughts have been influenced by this strong Christian presence

around him remains to be explored in full.[20]

Sankara in his 64 *Anacharams* or special code of conduct for Namboodiris or Malayalee Brahmins specifies that only white dress must be worn by members of the community. Now it is well known that Brahmin women in S. India - in Karnataka or Tamil Nadu or Andhra - wear only dark coloured Chelas from Kancheepuram or elsewhere. The Christian women of Kerala are well known for their white dress with the beautiful fan-like arrangement at the back called *Njori* which adds to their beauty and testify to their admirable modesty. By adopting the white dress and the *Njori* the Brahmins of Kerala were trying to ensure their own aristocracy.

Sankara further enjoins his community to eschew all nasal ornaments: *Nasabharanam Nishidham*, although Brahmin women elsewhere in India are addicted to nasal ornaments. It is for the Christian community of Kerala alone that Nasabharanam is Nishiddham and nasal ornaments still remain taboo to ancient Christian women of Kerala and to the Antharjanams (Women of the Brahmins).

Into the similarity of many other customs of Brahmins and Christians it is not necessary to enter here. Although the similarities in the birth ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, and funeral ceremonies of these two communities are quite striking, often indicating that, the Brahmins when they arrived in Kerala borrowed the customs of the then ruling community of Kerala viz. the Christians [cf. Placid, Ferroli, Cherukarakkunnel in *STCEI*, II, 1973].

Although many of the matters mentioned in this paper must have been well understood by the Brahmin and upper caste scholars, somehow efforts to make these matters common knowledge were never made or were suppressed. One theory that helped keep things hidden was the Lacuna theory or Dark Chapters theory. Those who wrote history said that the second half of the first millennium in Kerala history was a dark age and a lacuna existed in our knowledge of this period. These 500 years between 500 C.E. and 1000 C.E. were precisely the centuries when age-old Christian dominance in Kerala declined giving way to Brahmin ascendancy. However there are many documents dealing with this period which are ignored or deliberately overlooked by such historians.

Many of the earliest existing documents in Kerala history deal with the Christians or Mar Thoma Nazranies of Kerala often called the Syrian Christians. The half a dozen Pahlavi crosses are one set of such records. The Kinayi Thoman copper plates, the Thazhekkad Rock Inscription, the Tharisappalli copper plates, are another set of records. All these belong, certainly, to the first millennium C.E.

The oldest places in Kerala are connected with the ancient Christian community of Kerala. Palayur, Parur, and Kodungalloor are instances of this. It may be remembered that these three places, which occupy a place of pride in the St. Thomas Apostolic story are all on the oldest and biggest geological plate underground, so that generally these places were never affected by earthquakes. The location of Parur and Kodungallur in the vicinity of ancient Muziris must be noticed.

By the reverse projection of Kerala's population we may arrive at a maximum figure like 300,000 for the population of Kerala in the 1st century. If the stories of conversion of people by St.Thomas has any credibility the majority of people in Kerala, mostly inhabiting the 7 places where the apostle worked, must have become Christians - and the types of political and social systems and institutions of the Sangham age were perhaps very much influenced by this huge and powerful Christian community.

The large hoards of 1st century BC/AC Roman Gold coins of Caesars Augustus, Tiberius and Nero d covered from the Palayur and Parur belts indicate the close contact these areas had with countries and cultures on the western side of the Arabian Sea.[21]

There are records from practically every century, every civilization, every Church, and in every language, not only about Kerala and her products but also about the beginnings and development of Christianity in Kerala and India. All that can be done here is to direct the listener to a list of these writings in f.i. Chapter 2, *Kodungallur : City of St. Thomas* by this writer.

Just two more paragraphs: One about the status and social position of the Christians in the early centuries. Only hundred and fifty years back when women in Kerala tried to cover the upper part of their body there was a huge commotion which resulted in the *Channar Lahala* or the mutiny of the Channar caste. But then 1500 years back Christians in Kerala were wearing silk gowns, silk turbans, gold ornaments above their head and on their body. Even today the gold business in Kerala is mostly in the hands of old Nazraney families.

The 72 privileges enjoyed by Christians even before the different copper plate grants reassured their right to continue to enjoy those privileges indicate that the Christians were the predominant and ruling community of Kerala before the Brahmins gained dominance towards the end of the first millennium. The marriage customs of the Christians described in the epigraphs and in the old songs of these Christians will throw considerable light on the royal privileges and aristocratic status of the Christian community in Kerala during the past well nigh 1900 years.

The art and architecture of these Christians - with their rock work, metal work, wood work, ivory work and artistic creations in every known medium - and with their *Deepasthamba* or lampstand, *Dwajasthamba*, or flagstaff, rock crosses inside and outside the churches, their baptismal fonts - bear ample testimony to their place in society in bygone centuries. The base or pedestal of the open-air crosses is like the *Balikkallu* or sacrificial altar stone of the temples. But the *Bali* on the *Balikkallu* in the rock crosses is the supreme *Bali* of Jesus symbolized by the cross - the *MahaBali*. Also it is interesting to note that all the crosses rise up from the lotus. In fact the national flower lotus and the national bird peacock first appear in Kerala art on the rock crosses. Some of these you can see when you visit churches at Kottayam (e.g.the Valiyapalli).

All these facts indicate that Brahmins and Brahmanism and Vedic Hinduism arrive in Kerala at a very late date and become powerful only by the end of the first millennium, while Christianity was here many centuries prior to that, and was here perhaps a strong

presence even in the first centuries.

These facts are presented here to elicit your valuable opinions and comments. Thank you.

Notes:

1. R. L. Stevenson, "An Apology for Idlers" in "Virginibus Puerisque."

2. The same.

3. But see: G.K.Chesterton, "George Bernard Shaw," Bodley Head Library, 1937, chapter one, third paragraph.

4. Swami Siddinadananda, Hinduism, *in the* St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, *Vol.III (in the press), Ed. Prof. George Menachery.*

*5.*The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia, *Dell, 1964, p.803.*

*6. Here is an early 20th century definition of Hinduism (*The New Standard Encyclopaedia, *1936, p.641): "Social and religious organization in India. It is a development of Brahmanism and is divided into a number of groups. There were in 1931 altogether 239,195,140 Hindus in India, and they are thus the dominant people in the land. Buddhism affected early Brahmanism and both existed down to about A.D. 800, when the latter disappeared from the peninsula, leaving a new Brahmanism, the product of both philosophies. This modern Hinduism, based on the Puranas, gives less prominence to Brahma than to his associates Vishnu, the preserver, and Siva, the destroyer and reproducer. They are worshipped in innumerable forms, both in their male and female aspects, the latter being emphasized by Saktiism, which derives its teaching from the Tantras."*

7. Pliny described Cranganore (Muziris) in Kerala as Primum Emporium Indiae.

8. For a scientific but short discussion and proofs of early Greek and Roman knowledge of India and Kerala nothing better can

be suggested than "The Apostles in India, Fact or Fiction?" by A.C.Perumalil S.J. first published in 1952 (Patna). Also cf. Pliny, 6.23 (26); Schoff, H. Wilfred, The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, *Longmans, 1912, p.232; McCrindle J.W,* Ancient India as described in Classical Literature, *Westminister, 1901,p.111.*

9. Swami Siddinadananda, op. cit.

10. The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia, *pp.803, 804*

11. M.G.S. Narayanan, "Namboodiris - Background and Early Settlements in Kerala," paper presented at LIREC, Mt. St. Thomas, 4th Sept., 2000.

12. Emphasis by the present writer.

13. Kesavan Veluthat, "The Nambudiri Community: A History," paper for the LIREC seminar, Mt. St. Thomas, 2000.

14. Emphasis by the present writer.

15. M.G.S. Narayanan, op.cit.

16. Prof.George Menachery, "Social Life And Customs Of The St.Thomas Christians In The Pre-Diamper Period", in The Life and Nature of the St.Thomas Christian Church in the Pre-Diamper Period, *Ed. Bosco Puthur, Kochi, 2000, p.197.*

17. Id., Ibid, p. 202, f. n. 27. For a full list cf. K. V. Soundara Rajan, Art of South India: Tamil Nadu and Kerala, *Delhi, 1978; table reproduced in paper by George Menachery, seminar held by the Kerala History Association on* Kerala Sculptures, *Ernakulam, 11th Dec., 1983. Also in George Menachery,* Pallikalakalum Mattum, *Eiffel Books, Trichur, 1984, pp. 50,51.*

18. Cf. his doctoral thesis, chapter on Kerala Architecture and Sculpture, esp. pp. 579 et sq. and recent conversations.

19. See notes 16 and 17 supra.

20. Vide *the long article by De Smet, written in 1974 for the* STCEI; *cf.* STCEI III *(in the press). Also article by P. Thomas, "Christian influences on Hinduism before the European*

Period," STCEI, *II, 1973, p. 177, Ed. Prof. George Menachery.*

21. See Essay Two *below.*

Essay Two

St. Thomas in India and Kerala: *Numismatic Studies at the Service of Historical Research* - A Case Study

Indigenous advances in archaeology, numismatics, anthropology, epigraphy, geography, geology, ocean studies, art, architecture, anthropology, culture etc. in recent years have shed considerable new light on the early literature of India in an astonishing manner and the views held by many local as well as western scholars, both sincere and prejudiced, have been once and for all discredited and disproved time and again in the present century. This paper is presented here because numismatics proved extremely useful in researching certain 1st Century BCE/CE events that allegedly took place in various parts of India and because the writer considered it advantageous to have the opinion of the experienced scholars attending this seminar on certain facts and lines of thought not hitherto sufficiently well-pursued, and which could greatly benefit from their

added attention. And considering further the brief span of time for the presentation of papers, the discussion has here been restricted to only one of the aspects viz. Numismatics at the service of the historian of early Indian History in studying the veracity of certain 2nd/3rd century works, a number of ancient Indian folksongs, and certain strong traditions prevalent in various parts of the country. Researches conducted in connection with the preparation of *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India* (esp. Vol.II), *The Indian Church History Classics* (esp. Vol.I i.e. *The Nazranies*), and the setting up of various exhibitions and museums during a period spanning more than three decades and the writer's both long and brief association and long or short discussions with great scholars in the field of numismatics, Indian Ocean studies, cartography, archaeology, history etc. and his attendance at the meetings of the Numismatic Society of Tamil Nadu, the Epigraphical Society of India, the Place Names Society of India, the various Academies, and of this august body have been of immense benefit in these and similar studies. It is hoped however that after carrying coal it would not be discovered at the end of the day that it has all been to Newcastle.

A 2nd century CE work in Syriac, many poems by Ephraem (3rd/4th century), many folksongs in South India, a historical narrative committed to writing some five hundred years ago in Kerala, time-honoured traditions prevalent in many parts of India speak of the arrival, travels, and activities of a visitor from around Alexandria in India in the First Century

CE. The credibility of this 'Thomas legend,' as described in Kerala-Mylapore tradition, in the Song of Thomas Rambhan, in the Margam Kali songs etc., and in the *Acts of Judas Thomas* has been vehemently questioned and denied by the vast majority of western scholars during the major part of the 19th century. It has been said and with quite some truth that this vehemence was at least partially due to the fact that many westerners refused to believe that their own present religion, though originally from the East, had arrived in another country, that too a 'pagan' and 'idolatrous' country like India many centuries before it had come to their own motherlands in Europe. Whatever the truth of this one thing is certain: these western scholars left no stone unturned in their attempts to disprove the Indian 'legend' about the travels of the Alexandrian visitor Thomas.

Among the strongest arguments used were: There is no king of the name Gondaphares (as mentioned in the 2nd C. *Acts*) in Indian history, none of his coins had ever been discovered, no *Vamshavali* of Indian kings mentions such a name etc.; it is not possible to associate the specific places, routes etc. mentioned in the *Acts*, traditions, songs, and narratives with first century contacts with the west. These are the only two objections we are dealing with here and analyzing in the light of numismatic studies and developments in the subcontinent.

A most dramatic discovery in the field of numismatics in India effected a magical change in the understanding of this whole story. This was as a result of the excavations made both to the east and west of

the river Indus. Long before any coins or inscriptions of Gondaphares had been discovered, the name of the king was familiar to the western world in connection with the visit of Thomas in India. In the several texts of these 'apocryphal' books the king's name appears variously as Gudnaphar, Gundafor, Gundaphorus, and Goundaphorus. His brother Gad's name also is mentioned there. Yet those names were totally unknown to history until large numbers of coins of this king were discovered. On his coins it appears, in Karoshti, as Guduphara or, occasionally, Godapharna; in Greek, as Undopheros, Undopherros or Gondopherros, which apparently represent local pronunciations of the Persian Vindapharna = 'The Winner of Glory'. The Greek rulers of the Punjab were ultimately overcome by the Saka tribes of Central Asia...They established principalities at Mathura, Taxila, and elsewhere. We are here concerned with one of these Persian princes, known to the Greeks as Gondopharnes, who was in 50 CE succeeded by Pacores. His kingdom comprised Taxila, Sistan, Sind, Southern and Western Punjab, the NWFP, Southern Afghanistan, and probably part of the Parthian dominions west of Sistan. Hence he could be considered both as an Indian king and as a Parthian. [cf. Farquhar, North India, *I.C.H.C.* v. I, p. 313 ff.; Sir John Marshall, *A Guide to Taxila*, 4th Edn., Cambridge University Press, 1960. For photographs of some Gondophares coins, see Medlycott, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, London, 1905 , or in *ICHC I* p.191, or *STCEI I* 'Montage' inside front cover, and *A Guide to Taxila*, plate III (18).] From the time of the discovery

of these coins there has been hardly any scholar who doubted the North Indian visits of Thomas, even among those who continued to have reservations about the person's South Indian sojourn. However this accidental discovery made the western scholars attack the credibility of Thomas' South Indian visits much more vehemently and even venomously. But here also numismatic discoveries shed some much needed scientific light to these critics' chagrin.

In 1847 a most fascinating discovery of Roman coins was reported from Kottayam near Kannur (British Malabar), yet another evidence for the existence of a great deal of trade between Kerala and the west in the first centuries BCE/CE. The purity of the gold, one of the reasons for the acceptability of Roman coins all over the then known world, attracted the notice of the jewellers, and the wealthier natives who had purchased them melted them down for ornaments. Almost the whole of the massive hoard was lost irretrievably in this way. However, 51 coins believed to be from this hoard are included in Catalogue No. 2 of the Madras Museum by Edgar Thurston (1894). These belong to the issues of Augustus (10), Tiberius (4), Caligula (4), Claudius (15), Nero (13), and Ant. Pius (5).

The next significant and properly documented discovery of Roman coins in Kerala was from Iyyal, a few kms. from Palayur (Palura, Palaiyur, Palayoor) in the Trichur District, the location of one of the seven Malabar or west coast churches the founding of which is traditionally and in the Rambhan song attributed to St. Thomas. In an earthen jar discovered by Tharayil

Karuppan Krishnan there were 34 punch-marked coins, 12 Roman gold coins, and 71 Roman silver coins. The entire hoard was acquired by the Royal Arch. Dept. of the erstwhile Cochin State, and was at the Trichur Archaeological Museum and has recently been transferred to the Numismatic Study Centre, Nedumangadu. The hoard covers a period between 123 BCE and 117 CE. The denarii are from the periods of the Republic, Octavian & Augustus BCE 27 - CE 14, Tiberius CE 14 - 37, Claudius 41 - 54, and Nero 54 - 68. The aureii belong to the issue of Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, and Trajan. (Classified and published, P.L.Gupta, 1965, *Early Coins of Kerala*, Dept. of Arch., Trivandrum.) Touching these coins one has the exhilarating feeling that some of these might have been in the pouch or *Madisheela* or purse of Thomas on his way to or from Palayur. Photos: in Gupta (op.cit.); Menachery, *Kodungalloor City of St. Thomas*, Kodungallur, 1987, p.47; alias, *Kodungallur : The Cradle of Christianity in India*, 2000; and in Sathyamurthy, *Catalogue of Roman Gold Coins*, Dept. of Arch., Kerala, Trivandrum, 1992. Description also in Menachery, *Pallikkalakalum Mattum*, (Malayalam), Trichur, 1984 reproduced from *The Express*, July 1978.)

During the last decade, in September 1983, when workers were digging in the compound of Smt. Madhavi Amma, wife of Pazhuparambil Vasu of Valuvally near N. Parur a few miles from Kodungallur (both Parur and Kodungallur are sites of churches founded by the apostle of Christ in the vicinity of ancient Muziris), pots containing reportedly two

thousand coins were discovered. Before Madhavi Amma came to know of it many coins had found their way to the various toddy and arrack shops of the area. When this writer visited the spot in one or two days' time many more coins had disappeared. By the time Police investigations were thoroughly and systematically completed many more coins had vanished. Finally the Archaeology Department could acquire from the District Collector an even smaller number, a paltry 252 coins. These are now at the Numismatic Study Centre, Nedumangadu. Most of the coins are mint-fresh and include coins from Nero to Antonius Pius with representations from the issues of all emperors in between. All these coins have been published now (1992) by the Archaeology Department, by Dr. Sathyamoorthy, with detailed classifications and photographs of the O. & R. sides.

In this connection it may be interesting to note that the Kerala Archaeology Dept. and the Geology Dept. of the Govt. of India functioning at Trivandrum together held a consultation recently (1990?) under the inspiration of the Dept. of Culture, Govt. of Kerala to decide on a programme to investigate the gold and gold coins that might lie buried at the Kodungallur harbour from the beginning of at least the first century BCE, and to chart a scheme to salvage such material lost in Kodungallur on the Malabar Coast of the Arabian Sea. In any case the numismatic findings and studies have added much strength to the credibility of the Thomas story as they provide strong and tangible proof of the considerable intercourse that existed between Kerala and Alexandria / Rome in the first century B.C. / A.D.

especially from the middle of the first century A.D. and as these findings are mostly in the vicinity of the Thomas churches. A word about Kodungallur in the vicinity of Muziris and its special relationship to the Syrian Churches of Kerala and another word about the special relationship that has existed between gold and India in general and gold and Kerala in particular especially the Palayur-Kodungallur-Parur belt may not be out of place here.

The city of Kodungallur, known variously by Muziris, Shinkli, Cranganore, and by many another name (K.P.P. Menon lists more than a dozen names for Kodungallur from Al Biruni, 970 A.D. to Assemani, 1510) down the centuries, stood at the meeting-place of different trade routes connecting the East with the West and the North with the South. These trade-routes, which carried the bulk of the traffic passing by sea between India and foreign parts, played an all important part in the history of Cranganore. While the monsoon route connected Muziris directly across the Arabian Sea with cities in the west (e.g. Alexandria, Aden), the west coastal route gave its ships ready access to the Indus (leading to Taxila / Gandhara) and Ctesiphon by land and beyond to Ormuz and Mesopotamia. A third route, hugging the coast of East Asia linked the coastal capital of the imperial Cheras with the mouth of the Ganges and with China. We need not here dwell on the importance of Kodungallur or Maliankara or Malankara as the first landing place of Apostle Thomas on this coast.

The *Periplus* has this remark: "There are imported here in the first place a great quantity of coin...". The

Roman could, it is believed make a profit on the sale of gold coin in India, perhaps because these were not only used as currency but also for ornament as is evidenced by the fact that many gold coins found in Kerala have been pierced through to make necklaces. (Also see Thomas P. J., *Roman Trade Centres in Malabar* , Kerala Society Papers, II, p. 260 ; James Hough, *The History of Christianity in India* , I, p.28.). Recently Doug Smith wrote me:"... I have noted that an inordinately high percentage of Roman coins and copies of Roman coins found in India have holes. Many seem to have two holes at the top suggesting they might have been sewn to a fabric as decoration. Trade with India as an intermediate for China was active in the period you mention. Rome wanted silk and paid in gold and silver. One of the earlier pages on my site showed a silver coin that I believe to have been made in India probably after the debasement of Nero (ca. 64 AD) copying a coin of Tiberius which was popular in India due to its consistently good metal. I have seen a dozen of these from this same pair of dies. The copy was made looking at an off center original which was missing some legend. The cutter had no idea what to put in the missing space so he left it blank. I would be interested in hearing if any of these coins were found in the Kerala hoard." "It should not escape notice that gold and silver, after circulating in every quarter of the globe, come at length to be absorbed in Hindustan", Sir George Birdwood, p.101. Herodotus tells us that India is the wealthiest and most populous country on earth. As Sir George has again remarked, "The entire record of the

intercourse between countries of the west and India from the very earliest times to the present day may be said to be the story of the struggle for the Indian trade". "As is well known Columbus was on the lookout for Kerala pepper when he stumbled on America. It was pepper that brought Vasco da Gama to Malabar," P. Thomas, in *Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan*, London, 1954, pp. 6,7. Even today India is the world's biggest importer of gold. Even today gold fetches a higher price in India and especially Kerala. Kerala's Calicut airport at Karippur accounts for the largest import of gold in India, it along with its environs also accounts for the largest quantity of smuggled gold.

Visitors present here from outside the state and outside the country, especially the fairer half, may enjoy a visit to the jewellery shops in Trichur, Ernakulam, and Kottayam for some of the best craftsmanship in gold anywhere in the world. It won't be an accident if you find most of the best known gold shops are run by Nazranies or Christians from the Kodungallur-Palayur belt, mostly from the Trichur area. The names of Syrian families like Alappatt, Chemmannur, Chettupuzha, Chirakkakkaren, Chiriyankandath, Thottan, Palathingal, etc. are well known to gold connoisseurs all over Kerala and outside it. This 2000 year old tradition in gold makes Trichur near the Cheran's Royal City Kodungallur the Gold Capital of Kerala, with its hundreds of reputed jewellery shops, and this also has helped it to be considered even today the Cultural Capital of the State.

A further point of difficulty in reconciling the Kerala tradition concerning St. Thomas was this: While the

sea provided excellent means of transportation to travellers from the Malabar or west coast to the Maabar or east coast and vice versa by rounding the Cape, especially to strangers unaccustomed to the hardships of land travel from coast to coast in the risky terrain of the Ghats and forests, Thomas is invariably described in Kerala tradition as crossing between the Arabian sea coast and the coast of the Bay of Bengal by land, and apparently doing so with considerable ease. But Indian Ocean studies have conclusively proved that in the first centuries it was very risky for ships, especially foreign ships, to round Cape Comorin, on account of the rough and unpredictable waters. And now it is amply clear that the three lands of the Cheras, Cholas, and the Pandyas were connected by excellent roads. This is proved beyond doubt from the constant journeys made by the Sangham poets and poetesses as described in the *Purananoor* and *Akananoor* and even the *Pathittupathu.*

But the most arresting evidence for this inland traffic between the Southern Kingdoms is provided by numismatics. Discovery of Roman coins have been reported in Pollachi (1805), Karur (1806), Coimbatore (1817), Vellalur (1841). Even today chance Roman coins are being picked up on the route between ancient Muziris and Karur and between Karur and the east coast. Every annual meeting of the various numismatic societies brings some new discoveries of this field to light. The large number of Chera coins even today found in the riverbed at Karur and environs must be seen to be believed. This

permanently put to rest any doubts one might have had about the accuracy and authenticity of the Kerala tradition concerning the Apostle's journeys. The fact that the saint is usually represented in Kerala and Tamilnadu as carrying a lance or *Thrishoolam* instead of the traditional *Mattom* or set-square may indicate not only the martyrdom but the usual appearance of the man much travelled in the dangerous land of snakes and tigers.

What is most astonishing about the researches into the historicity of f.i. Thoma's Indian visits is the agreement of newly discovered data almost ʻithout exception with details known earlier. It gladdens the heart of the student when it is found that whenever a bit of new, authentic knowledge, is forthcoming that concerns the matter it has a tendency to invariably fall into place in the jig-saw puzzle and to untie the tangle of uncertainties. This comment will be appropriate if made again at the end of a study of recent advances made in fields other than numismatics also, such as Archaeology, Geology, Geography, Ocean Studies, Epigraphy, Anthropology, Art, Architecture, Culture, etc. into which we are not entering now for lack of time.

Essay Three

Cultural Heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church

One might justly feel frightened standing before such an august assembly of the most distinguished ecclesiastical dignitaries and scholars of this calibre; but for discussing the particular topic of this seminar Kerala cannot offer any forum more appropriate than this one. Especially, to discuss the topic of this specific paper viz. *The Cultural Heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church and Our Efforts to Preserve It* there could be no group of people anywhere else, more competent or more earnest, than is present here.

The topic of this seminar, one feels, has been wisely chosen since on the one hand there can be no two opinions about the invaluable nature of the cultural wealth of the St. Thomas Christians, and on the other hand such another topic does not exist with practically no scope for controversy or mutual suspicion or petty jealousy. There is to be found today considerable unanimity of opinion among all the Churches of the St. Thomas Christians and among the sub-groups

thereof, both among scholars and the People of God in general, regarding the need to study, research, preserve, and propagate this unique heritage - everyone expressing the strongest desire to earnestly cooperate, actively collaborate, and determinedly work together towards that end without any reservations. As was discovered in the course of more than one seminar held here[1] the cultural heritage of the community could be an effective binding force and one of the strongest rallying points - perhaps the chief one at the moment - that could unite all the groups and all the Churches that adhere to the St. Thomas tradition in a meaningful spirit of ecumenism.

Among the strongest arguments used were: What is Kerala culture? Who are the true inheritors of Kerala culture? When one looks at the near consensus among scholars[2] that the Brahmins (Nampoothiris) arrive in Kerala only much later than the third century C.E., their dominance decernible only after the 9th-10th centuries, and that the Nairs appear on the scene only after the twelfth century and even then only as Sudras as they are till this date, one might reasonably surmise that Mar Thoma Nazranies were the most influencial community in Kerala in the first centuries. Perhaps upto the year 849 (24 M.E.) when Ayyanadikal confers[3] once again the seventytwo aristocratic / royal privileges on the Palli (Church) and the Palliyars (Christians) these Christians combined in themselves all the aristocratic attributes of the Brahmins (*Purohitas*), the Kshatriyas (soldiers and rulers), and the Vysyas (traders and entrepreneurs).[4]

Before proceeding any further let us take another

look at this oft-used but much abused term culture. One uses the word culture in different contexts: When we say in English, She's a very cultured woman, what we generally mean is She's had a good education and knows a lot about art, music, painting etc. Similarly She's a person of culture would mean She likes and knows a lot about literature, art, music, etc. But there is much more to culture than all this.[5]

Other phrases come to mind: phrases like Culture Shock, Culture Gap, Cultural Stereotype, Cultural Cringe, and Culture Vulture.[6] Culture has been defined in various ways, but the truth is, so far a universally accepted definiton of culture has not yet been found. Kroeber and Kluckhohn list in their book *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*[7] about 250 definitions and even this list is not complete. Not to become too involved philosophically attention may simply be directed to the excellent article *Culture at the Service of Evangelisation in India* by Stephen Fuchs.[8]

In order to emphasise the point that in the phrase *Cultural Heritage* culture means much more than art, architecture, sculpture, literature, music &c. a few more quotations one may be kindly permitted to reproduce. Culture is that complex whole which indudes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.[9] Culture is everything. Culture is the way we dress, the way we carry our heads, the way we walk, the way we tie our ties - it is not only the fact of writing books or building houses.[10]

The Nature of Culture:

Culture is based on the uniquely human capacity to classify experiences, encode such classifications symbolically, and teach such abstractions to others. It is usually acquired through enculturation, the process through which an older generation induces and compels a younger generation to reproduce the established lifestyle; consequently, culture is embedded in a person's way of life. Culture is difficult to quantify, because it frequently exists at an unconscious level, or at least tends to be so pervasive that it escapes everyday thought. Thus the existence and use of culture depends upon an ability possessed by humans alone. It refers to behaviour peculiar to *homo sapiens*, together with material objects used as an integral part of this behaviour. Hence culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies, among other elements.[11]

The rock edicts[12] and copperplate grants[13], various *Granthavaries*, the *Ramban Song*[14], the *Margam Kali Pattukal*[15], the *Pallippattukal*[16], and other such songs, the letters and reports of the Portuguese and the Dutch, the Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper[17] contain much information for the various aspects of the culture of the St. Thomas Christians. But the most important source is the collective memory of the people, and the existing customs and traditions, in addition to the extant works of art, architecture etc.[18] Works by Ferroli, Schurhammer, and Placid, and the efforts of the three Hs: Heras, Hosten, and Hambye have contributed

greatly to our knowledge and understanding of the Thomas Christian cultual heritage. To understand, appreciate, and conserve the cultural heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church one must study all the aspects mentioned above in detail vis-a-vis the cultural heritage of all the other Thomas Christians and the cultural heritage of Kerala. These streams are generally quite similar and often identical with each other.[19] In a short paper of this length justice cannot be done to even a single aspect of this heritage. However let us deal with some items at random, knowing full well that the selection is bound to be arbitrary, and the treatment haphazard.

As the documentary video film, researched and scripted by the present speaker, screened earlier showed a number of examples of the various works of art in the Syro-Malabar churches it is not necessary to go into all that again here. Suffice it to say the works of art and architecture in wood, metal, ivory, stone, colours, plaster, shells, cloth, etc. in Thomas Christian churches and households form a considerable proportion of art objects in Kerala and their position qualitatively and quantitatively in the hierarchy of Kerala's art tradition cannot be questioned. Among the objects in these churches which contribute much to the artistic superiority of Kerala may be counted the huge pillarless roofs and roof decorations, the belfrys, the altarpieces, the ceilings, the wooden rostra (*Pushpakkoodu*), the processional *Roopakkoodu*, the wooden candlesticks, the open-air granite crosses, the copper-sheathed flagstaffs, the rock lampstands and the array of rock (*Chuttuvilakku*) lamps on the huge

Aanamathil, facades and their plaster images, baptismal fonts, bronze bells and vessels, wood and ivory statues, wooden boxes, gold and silver crosses, colourful processional umbrellas, multicoloured mural paintings, wooden panels, goldcoated woodcarvings, and a thousand and one other items. True some of these are of post-Portuguese origin. But typologically and from the point of view of the techniques used most of these are typically Keralite and often typically Christian in origin and use.

One of India's most celebrated festivals is the Pooram festival of Thrissur. This festival was planned, organised and established by Shaktan Tamburan of Cochin just two hundred years ago. Perhaps the most attractive item of this festival is the celebrated *Thekkottirakkam* with the heavenly sight of the changing of the colourful umbrellas. It is this changing of the umbrellas that brings to the Thekkinkad Maidan large numbers of visitors from India and abroad every year. Although even the smallest Syro-Malabar church has a dozen colourful Muthukkudas in its possession from the time of its establishment, it being an item of the 1500 years old 72 privileges of Kerala Christians, these churches or their festivals are not very famous compared to the two centuries old Pooram.[20] It is not having these art objects that matters, but using one's cultural wealth to the best advantage for the greater glory of God and man.

Adi Sankaracharya in his 64 so-called *Anacharams* made white cloth compulsory for Brahmin men and women. He made nasal ornaments taboo for Kerala

Brahmin womenfolk (i.e.the Antharjanams). Today the *Njori* forms part of the costume of aristocratic (*Aadya*)Nampoothiri women. Brahmin women everywhere else in India use dark-coloured dresses. Elsewhere they always use nasal ornaments. In Kerala only Mar Thoma Nazraney women have kept away from these two customs. Did Sankaracharya who lived in Kalady at the centre of Christian communities in the 8th/9th century borrow these customs from the aristocratic Nazranies to promote Brahmin acceptability? In any case white dress has always been a part of Christian culture in Kerala as also the taboo concerning the use of nasal ornaments. Here one might also make mention of the large number of similarities found between Nampoothiri and Nazraney customs regarding ornaments, marriage, birth, and death related ceremonies and observances, costumes, daily utensils and food items etc.

Kerala Christians have their own customs and traditions regarding many other matters, as f.i. in the names chosen for their children or in the type of *Palaharams* they make for holy days and festivals. There are even some curries and side dishes which are peculiar to the Christians of Kerala.

Institutions like Palliyogam and Pallikkoodam prospered under Christian aegis.

Liturgy, liturgical art and architecture, music, musical instruments, vestments, gestures and celebrations all formed another important part of the cultural richness of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Down from the first century we find Kerala

Christians almost invariably open to all the sections of world Christianity and willing to give a warm welcome to fellow Christians irrespective of their nationality or allegiance. For the Kerala Christian, Christianity was always the same whether it is of one brand or another. It was only much later that lack of unity and divisions become permanent features of Kerala Christianity.

Kerala perhaps is the part of India which has come into contact with the maximum number of different cultures from all parts of the world at least from the first centuries B.C.E. Kerala also came into contact with almost all world religions at an early stage. This exposure to world religions, and world cultures was maximum in the case of the Christians of Kerala as they were having a virtual monopoly of sea trade from during many periods. Hence Kerala Christians became world citizens before other parts of India became even aware of the existence of other cultures and other religions. This had had its positive and negative effects on the character and conduct of Keralites in general and Kerala Christians in particular. This is well reflected in the cultural heritage of the Kerala Christians. While this has helped the Thomas Christian to absorb some of the best things from all cultures, it has also led to their changing too fast and discarding the ways of their forefathers without much hesitation. This is best seen in their attitude to their cultural heritage.

In spite of Rome setting up various commissions and other bodies for promoting the protection and preservation of the cultural wealth of individual

Churches and for the promotion of better methods in the preservation of old records very little progress has been made by the Syro-Malabar Church in these matters. The writings and speeches of the Holy Father regarding these matters appear to have had little impact on this Church. This negligence is visible in its attitude to all aspects of culture, although here and there one could see some solitary efforts being made to remedy matters. The leadership which might be given by ecclesiastical dignitaries it may be hoped will bear fruit in the not too distant future.

Perhaps this is the place to sound a much needed warning to our own people to preserve their cultural and historical heritage. Anyone who has worked in the field knows the neglect and even vandalism of Kerala Christians towards their cultural heritage.[21] Old churches and monuments are demolished and replaced with ugly concrete structures, ancient paintings are rubbed off, and copperplate grants are sold for metal value; valuable records perish without being copied. And the general outrage to history and antiquity borders on the criminal. It is high time this is stopped.

We may conclude with Goethe: Men are so inclined to content themselves with what is commonest; the spirit and the senses so easily grow dead to the impressions of the beautiful and perfect, that every one should study, by all methods, to nourish in his mind the faculty of feeling these things. ...For this reason, one ought every day at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and, if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable

words. Goethe, Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship. Bk. v, ch.1 (Carlyle, tr.) [source: Stevenson]

Notes:

1. Cf., f. i., Questions 2 and 3 (p.226) on universally / commonly acceptable artistic / architectural features in the St. Thomas Tradition and such features of the Palliyogam along with the answers (pp.226, 227) given during the Group Discussions and the general recommendations (p.229 et.sq.) of the seminar on The Life and Nature of the St. Thomas Christian Church in the Pre-Diamper Period, *in Bosco Puthur (Ed.), LRC Publication No.1, LRC, Kochi, 2000. The different papers reproduced and responses thereto also may throw considerable light on this aspect.*

2. The views of Dr. M. G. S. Narayanan and Dr. Veluthattu Kesavan who have exhaustively studied the question of the arrival of Nampoothiri Brahmins in Kerala and their early settlements in Kerala may be read in their papers for the LRC Seminar on some of the Historical Questions related to 1. the Nampoothiris, 2. the Jews, and 3. the Sangham Literature held here in September 2000. Prof. Rajan Gurukkal and Prof. Scaria Zacharia gave prepared responses to the paper on the Early History of Nampoodiris in Kerala.

3. It is especially stated [in the copper plates] that Vijayaragadeva the king's representative, Ayyan Atikal the governor, Rama Thiruvatikal the governor's heir apparent, Prakriti (chief citizens), Adhikarar (officers), Arunnurruvar (The Six Hundred), and the Patis (local chiefs) of Punnaittalai and Polaikkuti were present on the occasion of this gift and this in itself conveys its importance. - M. G. S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, *Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1972, p.36.*

4. Because the 72 privileges have more rights and freedoms and authority incorporated into them than enjoyed even by Azhvancheri Thamprakkal, both a ruler and top Nampoothiri. (Read the Tharisappalli plates along with the Jewish plates for

some eleven of these privileges or Viduperus: Earth and water on elephant-back, day lamp, spreading cloth, palanquin, umbrella, northern drum, bugle, locked gate, arch, arch-decoration, and arrow.) Vide M. G. S. Narayanan, op. cit., ibid.

5. Cambridge International Dictionary of English, *p.334.*

6. Ibid.

7. A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions - *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, Mass., 1952, Vol.XLVII, No.1.*

8. The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, *Vol.I, Ed. G.Menachery, Trichur, 1982, pp.198 ff.*

9. Sir E. B. Tylor.

10. Aime Cesair.

11. Encyclopaedia Britannica

12. Like the Thazhekkat rock inscription and the later foundation stones and tomb inscriptions of many churches.

13. Like the Tharisappalli plates and the Palayur plates.

14. An English translation of the Song of Thomas Ramban sent by T.K.Joseph dated 6-7/3/1926 to Fr. Hosten s.j. may be seen in the Indian Church History Classics, *Vol.I* - The Nazranies,*Ed. G.Menachery, Ollur, Jan. 1998, pp.520-525.*

15. P.U.Lucas, Kottayam, 1910. A reprint, Ed. J. Vellian, is available (1980). In his Anthropology of the Syrian Christians *L. K. Anatha Krishna Ayyar has given English translations of many songs (which is available in the* ICHC, *Vol.I,* The Nazranies, *pp.500-506.*

16. Vide supra f.n.15

17. Gouvea, Antonio de, O.E.S.A, Jornada do Arcebispo de Goa Dom Freyn Aleixo de Menezes, *Coimbra,1606. In English: Geddes, Michael,* The History of the Church of Malabar...Together with the Synod of Diamper...*London: 1694 (fully reproduced in Hough II and in* The Nazranies*). In*

Malayalam: Scaria Zacharia, Edamattam, 1998.

18. See the separate articles in the ecumenical St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, *Ed. G. Menachery, Vol.II, Trichur, 1973. Vols.I (1984), and II (1982) of the* History of Christianity in India *(CHAI - Ed. A. M. Mundadan) and the Malayalam* Kraisthava Vijnana Kosham *(Alleppy, 1976) also have much useful material. The* STCEI *and* The Nazranies *together have nearly one thousand photographs dealing with the cultural heritage of the Thomas Christians. A collection of articles by this writer entitled* Pallikkalakalum Mattum *in Malayalam (Trichur, 1984) has given as appendices a number of rather exhaustive lists of objects of art of the St. Thomas Christians gathered from churches and households for the various exhibitions organised by the* STCEI *from 1971 onwards and for the Christian Cultural Museum of Trichur (1980).*

19. Paul Manalil, Niranam Grandhavari, *Kottayam, 2002; Matthew Daniel,* Kraisthava Samskaram, *Thiruvalla, 1985.*

20. Yet when the local churches brought forth all their Muthukkudas *in 1983 for the Holy Year cultual rally it was a wonderful sight indeed that left the onlookers dumbfounded with joy. From that time onwards more and more processions in the State and even abroad are displaying the Muthukkudas and Historico-Cultural floats to advantage.*

Also cf. the photos and descriptions of the 25 cultural enclaves at the Papal Visit grounds, Trichur, Feb. 7, 1986 in the Trichur Papal Visit Souvenir,*1986 and the description and photos of the Historico-Cultural Pageant, CBCI Meet, 2004, Trichur in the CBCI 2004 souvenirs from Delhi and Thrissur.*

21. Cf. The many photographs and their captions in the STCEI, *II, Ed. George Menachery, Trichur, 1973.*

Essay Four

Granite Objects in Malabar Churches

An Investigation into their Distribution, Antiquity, and Significance

Indigenous advances in archaeology[1], numismatics[2], anthropology[3], epigraphy[4], geography and ocean studies[5], geology[6], art, architecture, culture, literature[7], folk arts, place name studies[8], etc. in recent years have shed considerable new light on the origins and situation of early Christianity in Kerala and as such serve scholars as meagrely used but excellent resource tools for Kerala historical studies in general and Thomas Christian studies in particular[9]. Perhaps this is the place where we might once again stress the importance of the study of local history[10], and the necessity for following an interdisciplinary approach, and for publishing scholarly findings in Malayalam

and in the popular media for the ordinary Nazraney who is only too eager and extremely enthusiastic[11] to learn about one's own roots, and stress also the compulsions of modern Kerala society where it is necessary and even essential to collaborate with secular scholars even in the investigation of matters relating solely to Church History, Art, or Culture[12].

Here, before I forget it, let me invite the scholars of history and culture to disseminate their scholarly techniques and learning among as many others as possible so that a sense of history, a love for historical research and cultural studies would develop among our people. More seminars, more and more workshops and tours are the need of this day and hour as well as the attempt to set up local organizations to arrange courses of study, seminars, exhibitions, museums etc. connected with local history as well as with church history and culture in general.

Rock Objects in Kerala Churches:

The present paper is an attempt to survey examples of rock-work in the art and architecture of the churches of Kerala in the light of recent studies and surveys, and to essay their significance for the study of Kerala history and culture. *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*[13], Vol.II, April 1973, (hereafter *STCEI* II), & I, and the *Indian Church History Classics*[14], Vol.I (i.e. *The Nazranies*), January 1998, (hereafter *ICHC* I) may be consulted for some ***one thousand illustrations***, a large number of which bearing on Christian art and architecture in India[15]. In those volumes there are scores of

pictures of rock objects from churches. Rock art in churches, represented by the Nazraney *Sthambam* or rock obelisk cross, the rock *Deepa Sthambam*, or lamp-stand, rock pedestal of the copper-sheathed *Dwaja Sthambam* or *Kodimaram* /flagstaff, are all found in front of the typical early Nazraney churches. There is also the exquisitely carved baptismal font or *Mammodisakkallu* in the baptistery, often situated at the west end of the nave, immediately after the portico or *Mukhamandapam*, beyond the main door called in Malayalam *Aanavathil*, which last often with granite doorposts and architraves. (However of late, especially in the west-Syriac tradition of Kerala, the baptismal fonts are to be seen near the altar to the right of the congregation, in keeping with the universal trend, where more and more Churches are allowing unbaptised persons to come near the altar.) True, these objects will only cover the front courtyard of the church and just take us beyond the threshold of the nave into the baptistery; but then we must stop with that for the present; although there are also a few statues, doorposts, *Gopurams*, pillars and tablets with reliefs, and architraves all in stone which deserve our attention.

Flights of Rock Steps:

Places of worship in Kerala as in many other climes were generally constructed on hilltops or the highest available spot in a locality, except of course those on the sea-coast and river banks. It is found that the reputedly earliest churches were on the sea shore, or on the shore of the lakes or *Kayals* and

rivers. Later churches were constructed in the interior at High Places. People reached these places of worship navigating the steep slopes, afterwards replaced by granite steps. The Thrissur Vadakkunnathan temple of *Pooram* fame is still reached by climbing the slopes, but most churches today have constructed granite flights of steps and side roads leading to them. The churches at Ollur, Kuravilangad, Uzhavoor, Parappur, Ramapuram, Kaduthuruthy (both churches), Kottayam (Valiya Palli), Palai (Old Cathedral), Parel, and Changanassery are reached by going up the flight of rock steps or *Nadakkallus*. There are many churches with *Sopanams* with balustrade like handrails on either side or without those handrails, all carved out of rock, e.g. at Parur and Kothamangalam. (By the way the Parur *Sopanam,* at least one of the carved hand rails, was seen last week in a broken condition!)

There are three striking objects of significance in front of the typical Malabar churches, either inside the courtyard or just outside it: the open-air granite (rock) cross which the present writer has christened *Nazraney Sthambam;* the *Dwaja Sthambam* or flag-staff made of Kerala's famed teak wood (e.g. at Parur), and often enclosed in copper sheaths / hoses or *Paras* (as at Changanassery, Pulinkunnu, Alappuzha, or Chambakkulam), or made out of some other timber or other material; the *Deepa Sthambam* in granite as at Kundra, Kallooppara, Chengannur, and Niranam. Sthambams or pillars of some type or other are to be found among the Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, etc. in

India. Such pillars and structures were part of the Christian heritage of Kerala much before the ascendancy of Vedic Hinduism[16] in these parts, although James Fergusson either did not know or did not care about these pillars [17].

Rock Crosses:

The open-air rock-cross of Malabar is an obelisk, a tall stone column, with four, sometimes decorated, but inscriptionless, slightly tapering sides, with arms added. In short the obelisk is a tapering rectangular stone column with a pyramidal apex. Rome has many obelisks (from Egypt and the East) which have been sometimes made into cross-bearing structures decorating the piazzas and squares (e.g. in front of the St. Peter's Basilica[18] in the Vatican). Others are near the Lateran[19], in the Piazza dell' Esquilino[20], in Piazza dei Cinquecento[21], in the Piazza del Quirinale[22], near the Piazza di Spagna (near the Propaganda Fide)[23], near the Piazza del Popolo[24], near the Piazzo di Montecitorio[25], and in the Piazza Minerva[26].

London has one on the banks of the Thames (Cleopatra's Needle) as one gets down from the Houses of Parliament; Paris has one at the place d' la Concorde; and even New York has one in the central park. Many memorials like the Washington Memorial are obelisk-shaped. The Asoka Pillar and other such Indian pillars must have been inspired by the Graeco-Parthians, under Egyptian-Persian influence. The *Nazraney Sthambam* is a direct descendant of the obelisk, and much closer to it than the other Indian pillars - in shape, method of

construction and transportation, method of erection, function, and solar symbolism. The Roman obelisk, bearing crosses today, have been converted to Christianity, while Kerala's cross-shaped obelisks were born Christian[27]. The *obelus* and the double-dagger reference marks in printing may be profitably recalled here. The Celtic rock crosses with their peculiar shape and intricate carvings are in another category.

The three-tier[28] gabled indigenous architecture of Kerala churches[29], which lacked facades until the coming of the Portuguese, immensely g ins in richness, symmetry, and beauty because of the open-air rock crosses, some of them more than 35 feet in height including the intricately carved pedestals, and monolithic shafts. No other community in Kerala has such a huge monumental stone structure, and no other Christianity has such a universal and huge emblem in front of the churches, except the obelisks of the Vatican and Rome which of course were not originally Christian symbols, but were later Christianized by the addition of crosses at their top[30]. The indoor counterparts of these open air crosses have the earliest carvings in Kerala of the national flower lotus and the national bird peacock. Perhaps even the national animal tiger is first depicted in Kerala art in church sculpture. It has been said that there existed no rock carving in South India prior to the period of these indoor crosses[31]. The motifs, message, and images on these crosses and their pedestals display a remarkable degree of Indianness and Malayalee *Thanima* or identity. Vedic

Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Ganesha, Vishnu, Shiva, Sapthamathas, Jeshta etc. appear in the art of the central Guruvayoor/Palayoor-Quilon part of Chera country only ca. the 10th-13th centuries, and even in the Salem-Erode section, and the Trivandrum-Cape Comorin section Vedic Hindu deities appear in art only as late as the 6th century A.D.[32]

The rock open-air cross employs three sets of sockets and cylinders. The base with a socket (cavity), the monolithic square and slightly tapering shaft with cylindrical terminals to fit the sockets, the horizontal piece forming the arms with a double socket (one cavity above and one below) in the middle, and the capital with a cylindrical bottom end are the four members of the open air cross[33]. They are so well chiselled and proportionate that when put together the socket and cylinder arrangement enables the cross to stand all by itself.[34] However for the bigger crosses, pedestals - in the form of sacrificial altars or *Balikallus* - are found, often carrying exquisite reliefs of the flora and fauna of the land in addition to scenes from the daily life of the early Keralites and biblical scenes. The cross representing the supreme *Bali* (sacrifice) or *Mahabali* appearing on the *Balikkallu* most appropriately represents the Calvary event and sheds plenty of light on the ideological, historical, theological, cultural and technological[35] bent of mind of the forefathers. Compare with the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius, Constantinople, A.D. 390.

The Obelisk and the Rock Cross:

The obelisk is a ray of the sun - here a ray of Christ (of Horus - Xt. the sun-God). This ray helps the lotus near - universally depicted on such crosses to blossom forth representing in a typical Indian poetic conceit the grace received by the sin - bound human soul (*panka - jam*) from Christ. Lotus, representing the sun is found in other early Indian and Asian art also. The Buddhist *Padmapada* concept also comes to mind. The half dozen interior Pahlavi inscribed crosses, some of them undoubtedly of at least pre 7th century origin, which were mostly tombstones before they were put up on the altars[36], have generally the dove (Holy Spirit) depicted on top of the clover or flower tipped equal-armed Greek cross, in addition to the lotus at the bottom[37].

In the three piece (*Thri-kanda*) Pahlavi cross one might, perhaps, with considerable effort read the lotus represented Brahma (Father), Vishnu, and Shiva. The arrangement to hold wicks found on the open air crosses may be related to the preservation of fire, and the effort to make it available to the common people in the dim past, when *Homakundams* were rare in Kerala or beyond the reach of the common folk. It is perhaps in connection with the need to preserve fire that the oil-*Nerchas* and oil *Araas* of the churches, and the compound - wall rock lamps are to be evaluated. The oil related objects in the churches also indicate the connection of this Christianity with the trade of the land, especially oil-trade. The bell like arrangement on some crosses also is noteworthy. Veneration of the cross, angels, Adam

and Eve... and of course the Indian Cross itself are some of the notable religious carvings on these structures.

Deepa Sthambam:

The square or polygonal shape of the individual pieces in the granite or rock lamp-stands at Kallooppara, Kundra, and Chengannur indicate the antiquity of such lamp stands in the churches. Unlike in the churches, in the temples, the tradition of these lamps continued and thus developed into the present-day round shape of the pieces. In art history generally the simpler forms make their appearance first, and refinements and complications indicate a later date. Even when the tradition of lampstands declined in the churches, many open-air crosses had wick holders incorporated into them, with the advantage that wind and rain do not put off the flames. Church walls still display rows of rock lamps (Kanjoor, Angamaly, Ollur). Inside the churches the tradition of bronze lamps continued vigorously, many churches still displaying rows of bronze lamps, representing a variety of shapes and types, and some lamps having even hundreds of wick holders, e.g. the *Aayiram Aalila* lamps at Arthat, Akapparambu, or Angamaly. The lamp, be it in bronze or rock, represents Christ who is light, as does the rock cross which is a ray of the Sun or Christ shining from the East.

Dwaja – Sthambam:

In front of the church the third interesting object is the flagstaff, sometimes covered with copper *Paras*.

Every festival is announced with the *Kodiyettu* or flag-hoisting, a tradition going back to early Buddhist times at least. The flag-staff at times has a carved rock pedestal. All these three objects in the courtyard of the church have a variety of liturgical functions associated with them, into which we are not entering at present[38].

Granite / Stone Baptismal Fonts:

Let us now climb and go across the portico and enter the *Haikala* or nave beyond the *Aanavathil* to look at the rock baptismal font in the baptistery. As we enter the church the huge doorways flaunting *Aanavathils* or *elephantine doors* or *doors for elephants* have Architraves and doorposts displaying good examples of south Indian rock-carving. (E.g. old Kayamkulam, Chengannur, Kanjoor). But the rock-baptismal fonts are the real pride of many an old church.

There are interesting rock baptismal fonts at Edappally, Kanjoor, Mylakkombu, Muthalakkodam, Changanassery, Kothamangalam, Kadamattom etc. The similarity of these baptismal fonts with illustrations of the fonts used for the baptism of Constantine (4thC.) and Clovis (Rheims c.496) is remarkable.

All the old baptismal fonts are of granite or very hard laterite. They are all huge in size indicating that baptism by immersion could have been the order of the day. Most of the old baptismal fonts depicted in the *STCEI II* & the *ICHC I* were probably of a date prior to or very near the promulgation of the decrees

of the Synod of Diamper which made permanent fonts more or less compulsory. Although most of the old baptismal fonts/ baptisteries are found near the west end or middle of the nave on the northern side - Kaduthuruthy (Big), old Edappally, old Kanjoor, Changanassery (Southern side), in many churches, mostly Jacobite/Orthodox they are found today close to the sanctum sanctorum e.g. Angamaly (Middle-church), Kallooppara. They are exquisitely carved with reliefs of the baptism of Christ, Mary feeding the Child, angels, Indian crosses, etc. There are also wonderful motifs of leaves, the basket pattern, coir pattern, etc. engraved on these stones. By the way the very Malayalam word *Mammodisakkallu* indicates a font made of stone. Another term is *Mammodisath-thotti*. The Holy Water Font is called *Annavella Thotti* also often in stone.

[Here permit us by way of digression to mention a word about Asoka the Great and Taxila the major source of Indian sculptural tradition, other than Mathura. Alexander the Great and his general Selucus both westerners were in Takshashila or cut stone (Taxila) in Gandhara, the land of Gandhari and Shakuni on the banks of the Indus, before the architect and builder Thomas arrived in those parts. The daughter of Selucus supposedly married Chandra Gupta Maurya. Their (?) son Bimbisara was the father of Ashoka the Great. Was Ashoka a foreigner? Until James Pincep deciphered the writings on an Ashoka Pillar in the 19th century, our knowledge even of this great Indian emperor was minimal. Compared to this our knowledge of Apostle

Thomas' Indian sojourn must be considered quite adequate. But that is another story.]

The national emblem of India is derived from one of the Ashoka pillars. One can see this emblem of four lions and the wheel on any Indian currency note in one's pocket. Those lions of Ashoka roared not in hostility but in love. The roar of these four lions for love we next hear from the amazingly attractive ancient rock baptismal fonts of Malabar, at Edappally, Kanjoor, and elsewhere. These four lions support the hemispherical basin of the font, as the Ashoka lions were supporting a globe, in the very same manner in which the Egyptian obelisks were supporting the shining disk of the Sun. But in the midst of our other interests we failed to give our ears to these voices and to preserve these great Malabar lions, an endangered species, indeed, in our own midst.

For at Edappally e.g. the stone baptismal font was dismantled into three pieces and strewn about the courtyard of the church, at the mercy of the innumerable pilgrims and pick-pockets frequenting the spot.

At Angamaly one could still see (i. e. before the huge new church was built) the old baptismal font in many pieces near the priests' kitchen. In Punnathra the font is used to collect rain-water, a euphemism this writer has been using for a salty human out - pouring. At Kudamaloor in 1970 to photograph the font once used to baptize the Blessed Sr. Alphonsa this writer had to rescue it from the many layers of plaster on the wall. This list it is not

necessary to prolong. Cry, the beloved country.

Antiquity and Significance

Although to investigate the antiquity of art objects in Kerala is a complicated exercise, and a discussion of their significance is even more tricky, let us proceed with some observations here in this regard, most of which have already been made from time to time, in one form or other, by the present writer, hoping that others would travel farther along these and other roads, and would indeed find better paths..... As the time and space allotted this paper have long been overrun we will have to be content with a few pointers only.

A schoolboy definition of philosophy is "the contemplation of the unknown". And theology thus becomes the contemplation of (the unknown) divine. What follows is merely some stray thoughts on the antiquity and significance of the rock objects in the churches of Kerala.

The Unique Place of the Cross in Kerala

The ubiquitous cross of Malabar churches is best represented by the rock crosses, mostly outside the churches. This open-air granite cross is the central point of many liturgical observations and ceremonies and processions. Festival related and liturgical processions in Malabar are of at least four kinds: certain *Pradakshinams* or processions starting near the altar end at the *Mukhamandapam* or portico of the church; many others, importantly, enter the courtyard and go round the rock cross, others go round the church, still others wind along the valley-

roads and *Angadies* surrounding the church-hill, commencing and concluding at the foot of the rock-cross. In every procession processional crosses occupy places of honour. In funeral processions also the cross is at the forefront of the procession.

The Kerala Christian gets up in the morning making the sign of the cross, and goes to bed making the sign of the cross. Not only that. The night prayer before going to bed "*Yudanmarude Raajavaaya Nazraayakkaaran Ishoye*" is a translation of the INRI on the cross of Jesus. The sign of the cross is made at the four ends of the bed before retiring at night. The sign of the cross is made on doors and entrances with the ash on Ash Wednesday, now Ash Monday. The Way of the Cross is a favorite devotion of the Malayalee.

St. Thomas is the Old Man of the Cross or *Kurishumuthappan*. Wayside chapels are *Kurisu Pallies*. There are large numbers of crosses in gold and silver and other metals and in wood and cloth and paint and ivory and every other imaginable medium in every church. There are crosses adorning the triple facades of the churches or triple *Monthayams*. The cross and the crucifix are to be seen everywhere in the churches. The cross is ***the*** symbol of Christianity in Kerala, especially when it is recalled that there were no images other than the cross in Kerala churches before the advent of the Portuguese.

Another Significance

Tree worship, characteristic of pre-historic, primitive, and aboriginal communities must have

been common at the time of the arrival of St. Thomas in India. Sangham literature has many descriptions of kings, especially the *Moovarachars* – the Cheran, the Cholan, and the Pandyan – planting, nourishing, and celebrating their own dynastic trees, and of cutting down and destroying the sacred trees of the enemy[39]. The tree, like the pole and the tower represents the *axis mundi* and connects heaven and earth, and sometimes even hell[40]. The sacralisation[41] of a spot was often achieved by the planting of a tree like *Arayal*, or the setting up of a stone, or the building up of a tower – as the means of communication between man and the divine, between earth and heaven. This idea is perhaps well represented in the obelisk and in the open-air rock cross of Kerala. Before a place could be inhabited it must be created[42] and the establishment of the cross creates sacred space, around which people could stay and live. Was this the meaning behind Thomas the *Kurisu Muthappan*, and Sapor and Proth the *Kandeesangal* planting crosses all over the place, initiating Chrstian places of residence and commencing Christian Congregations and Communities.

Certain other ideas which could be read into the rock objects have already been mentioned in this paper, and as such are not being gone into again.

Procedures for assessing Antiquity

How old are the rock objects in the Kerala churches? Have their antiquity been measured scientifically? What are some of the means at our

disposal to measure the antiquity of these objects? These are a few questions which ought to be discussed.

As the maximum possible age of Christian artefacts cannot be more than two millennia, and will be in most cases only 1500, 1000, or even less years, certain kinds of scientific tests could not be conducted with any hope of obtaining reliable results even were the necessary facilities available here for conducting such investigations. The possible lack of the presence of organic material (such as wood, bone, charcoal) on these objects has been pointed out by certain archaeologists and associated scientists as reasons for the inability to precisely fix the dates of such objects[43]. However it may be possible to get better results in the future if experiments could be conducted with international collaboration. The State and Central governments and departments of archaeology must have a positive approach to these studies.

One of the methods used today is based on typology. Using this method Kerala archaeological departments and archaeologists and historians associated with the study of Kerala artefacts have come to the conclusion that the Pahlavi crosses are most probably of a period between 3rd and 7th centuries, although some of these crosses are replicas of the earlier crosses and hence might belong to the 9th or 10th centuries. While a member of the Archaeology Advisory Board of the Government of Kerala (1975 – 1982) this writer had many opportunities to discuss these matters with

archaeologists from India, and also with archaeologists in Britain, Egypt, Rome, and elsewhere during wanderings abroad, and their views have helped to formulate these tentative conclusions, although final conclusions could be arrived at only after more systematic consultations.

The history of the royal Sassanid language provides another clue. The Sassanid, the dynasty that ruled Persia from 226 to 641 CE. had Pehlevi (Pahlavi in Parthian) for their official language. Since the language itself ceased to exist soon after the decline and fall of the Sassanid dynasty around mid 7th century original objects with the script could not be later than say 4th or 5th century CE. Hence the Pehlevi crosses could not be later than the 7th century at the latest.

There are listed in the Diocesan Directories and elsewhere the accepted dates for the establishment of the various churches in Kerala. Choosing only the pre-Diamper (i.e. 16th C. and earlier) churches mentioned in the Malayalam records of the Synod[44] and Gouvea's *Jornada*[45], the churches founded in different centuries could be chronologically classified[46]. Also each Malabar church acknowledges a mother church; by going from mother church to mother church until arriving at the first seven churches the chronological position of a church could be decided vis-à-vis other churches[47]. This will help decide the approximate date of the church.

The copper plate grants, the rock inscriptions, the wooden beam inscriptions, the *Granthavaris*, the

statements of missionaries and travellers, folklore, the Song of Thomas Ramban[48], Margam Kali *Pattukal*[49], *Pallippattukal*[50], *Kurishinte Pattukal* [51] etc. also have clues to the establishment of churches, and directly or indirectly to the establishment of the Rock Crosses &c. All these aids must be intelligently utilized to decide the dates of the rock objects in churches.

The tools are there, the persons are there, only our firm will is required to compile an authentic history of our land and our Church. Let us wish ourselves Good Luck!

Notes:

1. *A recent instance is the discovery of a large selection of artefacts such as a Chera coin with elephant, ankusha, bow & arrow of the 1st. century CE, a portion of an amphora, shards of pottery, bricks used in construction, ringwells, beads, rouletted ware, b&w ware... all from the early historical layer during excavations conducted by Dr. Shajan and Dr. Selvakumar at Pattanam near Parur on the south bank of the present Periyar river, a few miles to the south of Kodungallur. Roberta Tomber of the University of Southamton, Dr. M.G.S Narayanan, Dr. P.J.Cherian and many others believe that this was the site of the ancient Muziris of the first century Greek and Roman writers. Cf. their papers presented at the seminar conducted by the Kerala Historical Research Society, Sahitya Academy, Trichur. Also see the* Administration Reports of the Royal Cochin Archaeologists, *Rama Pisharoti and Anujan Achan for pre-independence years, reprinted in George Menachery, ed.* The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, *Trichur, 1973, left col., p.53 to right col., p.159.*

2. *Cf. "Numismatics at the Service of Historical Research," papers presented by G. Menachery at the Madras and Karur congresses of the Numismatic Society of Tamilnadu and at the Thrissur,*

Kanyakumari, and Veliyanad conferences of the Numismatic Society of South India. Some of these papers may be read in the issues of the HARP, *Kottayam (Ed. Dr. Jacob Thekkepparambil);* The St. Thomas Christians Journal, *Rajkot (Ed. Bp. Gregory Karotemprel); and the many issues of the electronic journal* 'Light of Life,' *2003 – 2004, New York, N.Y.*

3. *One relevant work is the* 'Anthropology of the Syrian Christians', *L. K. Anantha Krishna Ayyar, 1926, Ernakulam, portions from which have been reprinted in* ICHC I, *pp. 485* et. sq.

4. *The excellent translations of the Tharisappalli Christian plates of 849 CE and the Jewish plates in* Cultural Symbiosis, *M. G. S. Narayanan, Kerala Society Papers, 1972 are essential tools for all students of Early mediaeval Kerala history and culture.*

5. *See "Roads to India," article by Maggie G. Menachery in the* St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, II, *Trichur, 1973. This topic is treated at length in Chapter I of* Kodungallur:.. *G. Menachery and W. Chakkalakkal, 1987,(reprint 2000), Azhikode. A. C. Perumalil SJ,* The Apostles in India, Fact or Fiction?, *1952, Patna elaborately deals with the first century Roman and Greek contacts with India and Kerala. K. S. Matthew and collaborators have much on early and middle second millennium ocean trade.*

6. *The tectonic plate below the area from Palayur to Parur is supposed to be the largest one in Kerala and as such earthquakes &c. were quite rare in this area, helping the development of a continuous civilization here, giving birth to the growth of Muziris and other famous international trade centres down the centuries. Cf. Menachery, notes to Chapter I of* Kodungallur*: above.*

7. *The Malayalee ought to study the Sangham literature with some enthusiasm as it is the common heritage of all South Indians. The reluctance of certain historians and authors, especially of the secular historians and scholars of Kerala, to refer to the Sangham literature is somewhat beyond one's comprehension. The neglect*

especially of the beautiful lines of the Aka-nanooru, *the* Pura-Nanooru *and the* Pathittuppathu, *and other Sangham works has no justification except the prejudices of such persons. How come the avoidance of passages from the Sangham literature in the text books of Kerala? The mysterious loss of the first and tenth* Pathu *of the* Pathittuppathu *must be more vigorously investigated.*

8. *Each of the place names in the Palayur area f.i., such as Chowghat (Shapakkadu), Orumanayoor, Puthumanassery, Arthat, Chemmanur carry some historical significance and as such ought to be scrutinized by the student of Kerala history. Cf. G. Menachery,* Aashamsa, *in* Chemmannur Kudumba Charithram *by Major Cherunny, Guruvayur, 1999. The many efforts to thro · light on Kerala historical problems from an investigation of local history and folklore must be enthusiastically encouraged. See "Introduction," G. Menachery, in George Emmatty, "*Kuttikalkku Kerala Charithram,*" 2003, H & C Publishing House, Thrissur and also his "Introduction" in "*Pazhamayude Peruma*" by Joseph Poomala, 2004, Trichur.*

9. *For more thoughts on these aspects of Syrian Christian historical and cultural studies the curious may refer among other sources the many end-notes by this writer in Chapters I and II of George Menachery & W. Chakkalakkal,* Kodungallur: City of St. Thomas, *1987 (reprinted as* Kodungallur: Cradle of Christianity in India, *2000), Mar Thoma Pontifical Shrine, Azhikode. Certain efforts have been made to utilise the expertise of secular scholars and institutions in these fields by conducting seminars, workshops, courses of lectures &c. on related areas by the Institute for Lay Leadership Training, (Estd. 1967) Thrissur; LRC, Kakkanad; Pontifical Seminary, Mangalapuzha, etc. For more references also see "Introduction" by the present writer in '*Angamaly Rekhakal*'(Malayalam, = Angamaly Documents) by Varghese Angamaly and Jomon Thachil, Merit Books, Cochin, 2002; "Introduction" by G. Menachery, in Dalitbandhu N. K. Jose, "*Adisthana Keralam,*" Vaikom, 2001; introductory article*

"Kerala Patanathinu Oru Kaivilakku" *by G. Menachery in The* Naalagamam of Palakkunnel Valiachan,' *Alleppy, 2001 &c. The museums set up/being set up at Mt. St. Thomas, Kakkanatt; Bishop's House Garden, Cochin; Jeevass, Alwaye; Palai; Ernakulam as well as the exhibits from the Christian Cultural Museum of Trichur (1980) now being displayed at the Palayur Museum could shed considerable light on these aspects of the question. The lists of exhibits at the Christian Cultural Pavilion, Kanakakkunnu, Trivandrum (First World Malayalam Conference), 1977; Christian Cultural Exhibition, Trichur* Pooram *Exhibition, 1978; Christian Cultural Exhibition, Malankara Golden Jubilee Celebrations, SEERI, Kottayam, 1980 also may be helpful here (*Pallikkalakalum Mattum, *G. Menachery, Eiffel books, Trichur, 1984).*

10. *Including historical and even quasi-historical studies, works, "souvenirs" &c. on families (e.g.* Kudumba Charithram*), churches (e. g.* Palli Mahathmyam*), parishes, places (e. g.* Sthala Puranam*), persons (autobiographies, biographies), institutional and organizational commemoration volumes.*

11. *The popularity of the many Christian historical and cultural museums and exhibitions today is an indication of this.*

The huge crowd of three lakhs people who enthusiastically assembled and exuberantly cheered the 1983 Cultural Rally and the 2004 CBCI Conference Historico-Cultural Programme at Thrissur were quite heartening.

12. *As these ideas have more than once been expressed from this very platform it is not perhaps necessary to go into that again. And the good news is that already substantial steps have been taken in this direction at least in a few quarters. Cf. f. i. the LIRC publications Ed. Dr. Bosco Puthur containing the proceedings of the* Pre-Diamper Seminar *and the* Seminar on Brahmins, Jews, and the Sangham.

13. *Published from Trichur, Ed. G. Menachery.*

14. *Published from Ollur, Ed. G. Menachery.*

15. *The Diocesan Centenary Celebrations Volume of Trichur "*Shadabdhi Smaranika*" (1987-91) has some two hundred related pictures. The Kanjirappilly Diocese has published an interesting volume of text and pictures. The Kottayam Diocese has a number of publications in the field to its credit. The Ollur Forane Church* St. Anthony Octingenary Celebrations Souvenir *(1996) has dozens of pictures. Of late many other dioceses and parishes have published useful works with quality visuals. Naturally, concerning recent works, one could speak of only those works which have come to one's attention.*

16. *"Christianity Older than Hinduism in Kerala," paper by G. Menachery, World Syriac Conference, SEERI, 2002, published in the* HARP *and afterwards in the* St. Thomas Christians Journal *and recently in the* Light of Life.

17. *James Fergusson,* History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, *London, 1876, passim.*

18. *135 ft., brought from Heliopolis in 37 A.D. Sixtus V ordered its placement before the basilica, employing it is said 900 men, 150 horses, and 47 cranes for the operation.*

19. *Oldest obelisk in Rome (from Thebes, 15th C. BCE) brought by Constantius II,357.*

20. *Set up here by Sixtus V in 1587. 48 ft.*

21. *Incorporated into the monument for the 500 Italian soldiers fallen at Dogali.*

22. *Shifted to this spot by Pius VI in 1786 only. 47.5 ft.*

23. *The hieroglyphics were incised after bringing to Rome.*

24. *78.5 ft. Augustus brought it to Rome from Heliopolis and it was dedicated to the sun. Most obelisks have various sun connections.*

25. *72.5ft. high. Brought to Rome by Augustus to celebrate his victory over Cleopatra.*

26. *The hieroglyphic on this small obelisk relates to the last of the independent Pharaohs, ally of Zedekiah the last king of Judah in*

the Bible.

27. *G. Menachery,1975 & 1978 in the course of interviews at Rome broadcast by Radio Vatican.*

28. *Cf. Article "Kerala Church Architecture" by Andrews Athapilly in the* STCEI II, *1973; and "Thomas Christian Architecture" by E. J. James Menachery in the same.*

29. *With their typical three tiered gabled roofing, which is the harmonious blending of the* Kazhukkol, Vala, Sheelanthi, Thulam, Monthayam,*and* Pattika, *reflecting the great skill of the Kerala* Moothasari *or carpenter.*

30. Vide *notes 17 to 26* supra.

31. *The Pallava rock carvings of Mahabalipuram are either posterior to or contemporary with the Pahlavi crosses. In any case in Kerala proper no rock carvings have been noticed before these Pahlavi crosses.*

32. *K. V. Soundara Rajan, Art of South India: Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Delhi, 1978.*

Aja – Eka Paada: - Thonda Mandalam, *8th C.;* Chola Mandalam, *11th C.;* Paandi Mandalam, *13 th C.;* Kongu – Chera Nadu, -.

Ananthashaayi:- Thonda Mandalam, *6th C.;* Chola Mandalam, *5th C.;* Paandi Mandalam, *8 th C.;* Kongu – Chera Nadu, *8th C.*

Ardhanaari:- Thonda Mandalam, 7th C.; Chola Mandalam, 9th C.; Paandi Mandalam, 13 th C.; Kongu – Chera Nadu, 9th- 10th C.

DakshinaaMoorthy:- 7; 9; 9; c.8.

Ganesha:- 8; 8; 7; c.8.

Harihara:- 8; -; 8; 11.

Jvarahareshwara:- 10; -; 9; 13.

Jeshta:- 8; 9; 8; 11.

Lingotbhava:- 8; 8; 8; after 11.

Sapthamatha:- 8; 9; 8; 14.

Thrimoorthi:- 8; -; 8; 8.

33. *This socket and cylinder arrangement of the rock crosses can be easily studied if one examines the recently discovered pieces of the rock cross at the Changanassery Cathedral Cemetery or the pieces in the Eastern church compound at Angamaly. In spite of requesting the church and convent at least a dozen times from 1971 to 2004 the pieces of the rock cross at Angamaly are still in a discarded condition there, approachable only in the hot summer when the grass withers away or when the snakes take a holiday.*

34. *In 1980 while establishing the Christian Cultural Museum, Lourdes Cathedral, Trichur the present writer came across all four pieces of a granite open air cross underground in the sandy compound surrounding the Enammavu Church (c. 500 CE). This was taken to the Cathedral on the eve of the inauguration of the Museum. Other office bearers of the Museum Committee, including its chairman who was the V.G. of Trichur then, waited with many bags of cement and two masons and helpers to put up the cross in front of the Museum. But when the four pieces were unloaded from the truck and put in place utilizing the sockets and cylinders carved out on the pieces the cross stood by itself sans aid of mortar or mason! Such experiences enabled the writer, when he was shown three pieces of the fallen cross collected at the Changanassery Cathedral Cemetery a few years ago by the Cathedral Vicar, to request him to look for a fourth piece, which was eventually discovered as a result of the old vicar's search. The discovery by this writer of pieces of a cross submerged in mud at Kalpparambu (1978?) led to its re-erection, once again providing the writer a chance to study the techniques employed in carving such crosses.*

35. *These are the aspects which should have been discussed in detail in connection with the significance of the rock objects had we not already hugely exceeded the allotted time and space.*

36. *The discovery of the St. Thomas Mount 'bleeding cross' while*

digging the premises is well known. The Alangad cross (see picture and description in ICHC I, *Ollur, Jan. 1998, p. 576 reproduced from the* Light from the East, *Chicago Bi-Monthly, 1953 with the caption: 'Persian Cross on tomb of Mar Jacob, Alangatt, India') remained for very long in the cemetery. The size and inscriptions on the other such crosses also show that they were tombstones before they were removed to the altar / wall.*

37. *The 'Tree of Life' theory and the 'Great Rivers' theory can hardly hold water archaeologically and sculpturally in the case of the vast majority of rock crosses where the lotus or the* Pookkallu *of the Kerala sculptor is only too well depicted, and finds comparison with the lotus on the* Balikkallus *of temples. But in theological and theoretical interpretations such ideas can perhaps help.*

38. *Cf. unpublished doctoral thesis "Thomas Christian Architecture," by Dr. E. J. James, Calcutta University, 1979. Also his article on the same topic in the* STCEI, II, *1973 and the unpublished doctoral thesis on Nazraney culture submitted by Ms. Joicy James Menachery, Mysore University, 2004.*

39. *In* Pathittuppathu, *Second* Pathu, Pattu *One, the tree of protection of the enemy* Poonkkadambu *is cut off at the king's command. In his introduction to* Pathittuppathu *G. Vaidyanatha Iyer speaks of this custom, p.xvi (Kerala Sahitya Academy, 1961).Similarly in his introduction to* Puranaanooru *P. R. Parameswaran Pillai also speaks in detail of this custom, p.xxxii (Kerala Sahitya Academy, 1969). The tree of protection or the tree of victory was generally Venga, Punna, Veppu, etc. Also cf. James Fergusson,* Tree Worship.

40. *The idea of* axis mundi *as understood by various peoples is elaborated by Mircea Eliade in his* Encyclopaedia of Religions *and elsewhere in his* Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return *(trans. from the French, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1959 &c.) and in his* Sacred and the Profane : The Nature of Religion, *(trans. from the French, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1959 &c.) and his many other books and articles such as*

Pattern in Comparative Religion *(trans. Rosemary Sheed, Sheed and Ward, London and New York). Mircea Eliade's thoughts were not fully known to me, and his works could not be found in the libraries of even some major seminaries. However after being introduced to the wealth of his thoughts by Fr. Elavathingal I have become an addict of his works. I find Jyothi Sahi and others greatly influenced by these thoughts (e.g.* Holy Ground, *Jyothi Sahi, Pace, 1998). Another writer who should be the constant companion of the student of Indian and Indian Christian art is Ananda Coomaraswamy (e.g.* Art and Swadeshi, *Ganesh and Co., Madras). There are a number of old editions of books by Coomaraswamy in the Public Library, Trichur and elsewhere in many of the major seminaries.*

Finally the attention of the listener is drawn to Anthony Kalliath, "Paths of Contextualising Indian Spirituality" in Christian Contribution to Nation Building: A Third Millennium Enquiry, *Ed. S. Ponnumuthen, CBCI-KCBC, Alwaye, 2004, esp. pp. 193-194 and related notes.*

41. Vide *note 40 above.*

42. *See note 40 above. Space does not permit us to go into the details of these observations. May be another time.*

43. *Carbon-14 has a half-life of 5,730 ± 40 years—i.e., half the amount of the radioisotope present at any given time will undergo spontaneous disintegration during the succeeding 5,730 years. Basically this means that half of the original amount of C14 in organic matter will have disintegrated 5730 years after the organism's death; half of the remaining C14 will have disintegrated after another 5730 years and so forth. After about 50,000 years, the amount of C14 remaining will be so small that the fossil can't be dated reliably. Under optimum conditions it has proved to be a versatile technique of dating fossils and archaeological specimens from 500 to 50,000 years old.*

44. *In f.i. Scaria Zacharia,* Udayamperur Soonnahadosinte Kanonakal, *Edamattam, 1998; Samuel Chandanappally,*

Christian Culture (Mal.), Kottayam, 1979; Bernard TOCD.

45. *Gouvea,* Jornada, *Coimbra, 1606; in English Geddes, London, 1694 (fully reproduced in* ICHC I, *1978). Recently LIRC has published a new translation of the* Jornada *by Pius Malekandathil.*

46. *Cf. the paper on "Sculptures of Kerala", G. Menachery, Kerala History Association, Ernakulam, 1983 where churches founded in each century from the Ernakulam area are listed: Akapparambu (16th Century), Kudavechoor (15th C.), Koratty (14), Chendamangalam (13), Chowara (12), Kanjoor (11), Vadayar (10), South Paravur (9), Moozhikkalam (7), Udayanperur (6th C.), Angamaly (5th Century), and Ambazhakkad in the 4th Century.*

Another approach is seen in G. Menachery, Kodungallur... *1987 (p. 41 ff. of 2000 reprint): Take one particular instance: The church at Ollur near Trichur used to be one of the wealthiest in the whole of Kerala. This church was founded only in 1718, one of the first important churches established after 1599. Before 1718 the people of Ollur used to go to Pazhuvil church for Mass, which Church was founded in 960. Before that, tradition goes they used to go to Enammavu church founded in 500. The nearby Vadakkan Pudukkad church was founded in 400, separating from the Palayur church of 52 AD.*

What is important is that the people of all these places unanimously subscribed to the truth of the Chronology, although time has brought about great changes in the status of each place, and yet the traditions concerning the origin of each church is recognised by all the churches unanimously...

"Thus these traditions have no less value than documents written on paper or stone."

47. *The* Shadabdi Smaranika *of Trichur Diocese has a similar approach in one of the articles by G. Menachery, 1987, where the 19th section closes with the remark: That the followers of various faiths and castes of a land unanimously accept certain historical realities increase the credibility of such tradition-based beliefs.*

48. *A 1926 English translation of the* Song, *by T.K. Joseph, has*

been published in 1931 by Fr. Hosten s.j., reproduced in the Nazranies, *p.520 ff. Fr. Bernard T. O. C. D. gives the Malayalam version, Pala, 1916.*

49. *Excellent English translations of many of the songs are given by Anantha Krishna Ayyar in his famous* Anthropology of the Syrian Christians, *Ernakulam, 1926. This portion is reproduced in the* ICHC I, *pp. 485–508. For the Malayalam see P. U. Lucas, Kottayam, 1910, reprinted in* Purathanappattukal *by Jacob Vellian and Cummar Choondal, Kottayam, 1980.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. Cf. article by George Menachewry, "Puthuppalli Palli:" esp. section on the art treasures of the church in "Puthuppalli Palli: Koodasha Smrithi," D.C. Press, Kottayam, 2003.

P(uthenpurakkal) U(thuppu) Lucas, Ancient Songs of the Syrian Christians, *Kottayam, 1910 has a number of songs on the crosses of Malabar, e.g. the "Song of the Cross of the Kaduthuruthy Valia Palli," "Song of the Cross at Kottayam Valia Palli," "Song of the Chungam Church Cross," " Ballad of the Kottayam Big Church Cross," "Song of the Malayattoor Cross," "Song of the Kudavechoor Cross," "Song of the Pirakkattu Cross," etc. Most of these songs have been reprinted in Vellian, "Purathanappattukal," 1980, Joythi Book House, Kottayam. English translations of portions of some songs may be read in L. K. Anantha Krishna Aiyar,* Anthropology of the Syrian Christians, *Ernakulam, 1926.*

Essay Five

The Palayur Church: Two Millennia-long Continuous Christian Presence in Kerala

In these days when one hears so much about Hinduising Christians in India[1], and about the late arrival of Brahmins - Namboothiries - in Kerala[2] an investigation into the origins and development of the more than nineteen centuries old Christian community and church of Palayur (Palayoor) in the Archdiocese of Trichur (Thrissur), located in the heartland of Kerala, has added significance. It is doubtful whether there are many places in the whole world which could claim a similar continuous Christian presence for well-nigh two millennia.

Any attempt to understand Palayur or its church, for that matter every attempt to understand the story of the St. Thomas Christians - their history, their liturgy, their spirituality, their art and architecture, their culture and society, their growth, development, progress , dispersion and spread - must begin with a

study of the geography and history of Kerala and her ways. Towards that end all the different tools of the modern geographer and historian must be utilised, giving due attention to anthropology, archaeology, numismatics, demography, place-names, family names, personal names, Indian Ocean studies, inland waterways and roads, cartography, folklore, art, architecture, literature, culture.....

Kerala: A Geographical Note

In the Special Collector's Issue of the *National Geographic Traveler* entitled 50 Places of a Lifetime only two items in India are included : One is Kerala and the other is the Taj Mahal. In that publication describing those Places of a Lifetime Bill McKibben has a long article about the historical landmarks and natural glories of Kerala. The prime minister of India A. B. Vajpaye (born on Christmas day 1926) spent the whole of Christmas week resting and holidaying in Kerala recently, enjoying the sights and sounds enthusiastically recommended by the *National Geographic*. The ideas in the following few paragraphs have been expressed by many a visitor to Kerala down the long centuries, but some of the phrases are McKibben's.[3]

Three Geographical Regions

Kerala may be divided into three geographical regions: (1) High lands, (2) Midlands and (3) Lowlands. The Highlands slope down from the Western Ghats which rise to an average height of 900 m., with a number of peaks well over 1,800 m. in height. This is the area of major plantations like tea,

coffee, rubber, cardamom and other spices.

The Midlands, lying between the mountains and the lowlands, is made up of undulating hills and valleys. This is an area of intensive cultivation. cashew, coconut, areca nut, cassava (tapioca), banana, rice, ginger, pepper, sugarcane and vegetables of different varieties are grown in this area.

The Lowlands or the coastal area, which is made up of the river deltas, backwaters and the shore of the Arabian sea, is essentially a land of coconuts and rice. Fisheries and coir industry constitute the major enterprises of this area. The devision of land into different categories in the (Tamil) Sangham literature may be recalled here: *Kurinji, Mulla, Marutham, Palai* and *Neythal.*

Kerala is a land of rivers and backwaters - forty-four rivers (41 west-flowing and 3 east-flowing) criss-crossing Kerala along with their countless tributaries. But these rivers are comparatively small in length and being entirely monsoon-fed, some of them will turn into rivulets in summer especially in the upper parts of Kerala.

Land of Coconuts

The name (Kerala) means "land of coconuts," and coconut-palms shade nearly the entire state from the tropical sun. Visitors can spend a day riding small ferries through the backwater lagoons or watching elephants cavort in the wildlife sanctuaries; the spicy food may be the best vegetarian cuisine on the planet.

A green shawl spread out in the gleaming sunshine Kerala - the paradise of travellers- is still largely

unmarred by the onrush of modernity. The intricate coconut groves, the lush greenery of the valleys and the splendid sights atop the hills are indeed alluring. The backwater cruises along the coastal lagoons mesmerize the travellers with the tranquilizing lullaby of nature.

Backwaters

Palayur is connected to other ancient trade centres of Kerala, especially Muziris, by rivers and backwaters. Kerala's network of canals, rivers and little lakes, is unique to this green and silver state. Some of them grew when the silt laden waters of Kerala's rivers deposited their suspended soil in banks, parallel to the coast. Others were man-made. The palm fringed, balmy backwaters, or 'Kayals', stretch along the coastal strip from Quilon to Cochin and farther. Local ferries chug gently through this unexpected version of rural India, providing one of South India's most profound pleasures, a cruise in the heart of a tropical Venice. In fact it is possible today to travel from Ponnani to Trivandrum by Kerala's waterways, a distance of some 200 miles (320 Kms.). The following somewhat lengthy description of the interior waterways of Kerala is of great relevance in our study of Palayur and other early Christian centres of Kerala, because like every European settlement in Kerala, and before that every Mahomedan settlement of Malabar, and earlier still, all ancient Christian churches in Kerala are to be found on the banks of a navigable river, or at its mouth, or at its confluence with the backwater.[4]

K. P. Padmanabha Menon continues in the *History*

of Kerala, Vol.I (pp.76 ff.): The lagoons or backwaters, which is a peculiar feature of Malabar (i.e. Kerala), extending from the Railway Station at Tirur to Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore, a distance of over 200 miles, affording easy and cheap communication. Originally, they lay detached in a manner obstructing continuous communication, but, in course of time, they have been connected one with the other by means of artificial canals.....The remaining important canals are the Parur, Quilon, and Chovare, which connect the intervening lakes with the Cochin system of backwaters. These extend towards the north almost to Chettuva from where commences the Ponnani canal which carries on communication up to Tirur.....In days gone by when wheeled and pack-bullock traffic was all but unknown, this system of waterways afforded the easiest, the cheapest and, perhaps, the only means of carrying on traffic.

Ibn Batuta travelled by backwater from Calicut to Quilon in early 14th Century in ten days. Varthema (1500 A. D.) who travelled from Calicut to Kayamkulam by backwater calls the water communication system a river.

Among the longer ones out of the two-score rivers that flow from the Western Ghats westwards to the Arabian Sea the following were in the old Travancore State: The Periar (142 miles), the Pampa (90 miles), Kallada (70), Kollakkadavu (70), Muvvattupuzha (62), Karamana (41), Minachil (35 miles).

River System of Cochin

The river system in the erstwhile Cochin State is of special interest to us since the three Thomas churches at Palayur, Kodungallur, and Parur, and even the other Thomas churches were connected together by these rivers and the backwaters given birth to by them. The Census Report of Cochin (Intro. p. XXXI, 1901) details this system:

The country is well watered by innumerable torrents, which pour down the hills. The chief among them are the Bharatappuzha or Ponnani river, which with its tributaries of Chemmantodu and Vettikkappuzha drains the Pottundi and portions of the Machad forests, the Chittur river, the Karuvannur river, the Chalakkudi river and the Periar or Alwaye river. The Alwaye in its course to the sea from south-eastern Travancore has but a short section within the limits of the (Cochin) State. At Alwaye it bifurcates, and flows into the Arabian sea by two mouths, one into the opening at Cranganur, and the other into that at Cochin. The drainage of the major portion of the forests of the Mukundapuram Taluk is performed by the Chalakudi river whose feeders, the Kappattodu and Kanankarittodu, form deep ravines and narrow gorges in the mountains. The river after its descent from the forest flows through picturesque and fertile tracts, and empties itself into the right arm of the Alwaye river at Elentikkara, about six miles to the east of Cranganur. The Manali and the Kurumali, of which the latter is fed by the Chemmani, the Muppuli and the Varulendian tapping the Paravattani and Kodasseri forests, unite into the Karuvannur river.

Portions of the Alwaye and the Chalakkudi rivers are much frequented during the hot season as bathing places. Both these rivers have great commercial value, being navigable all the year round for small country boats and barges. On the low lands, some of these rivers, which form the chief outlets for the drainage of the State, unite into shallow and irregular shaped lakes, or backwaters, which are the most remarkable of the physical features of the country. They open out into the sea at Chettuwaye, Cranganur and Cochin.

Between the Ghats and the Arabian Sea

The coastland of Kerala is a continuous stretch of unspoilt, white sanded beaches. According to popular myths Kerala originated from sea. Water washes ashore this lovely land and creates exquisite and picturesque compositions of sun, sand and surf. Tucked away in the South West corner of India, Kerala is a narrow strip of land between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats. Kerala was, in the words of Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan, "a fertile agricultural tract the peace and saftey of which were guaranteed by the Western Ghats on one side and the Arabian sea on the other. This land itself was a secret shared between the sea and the mountain, an illegitimate child of the two natural forces, protected by and provided for by them in a special way. Therefore there was an assurance of plenty and of peace."[5]

Cultural Scene

Kerala as mentioned earlier also contributes generously to India's cultural heritage with its music, song, dance, dance-dramas, ritual performances,

martial art forms,....like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Oppana, Theyyam, Margam Kali, Kalarippayattu, and the famous Vallamkali (boat-race). The Pooram festival of Trichur, some 30 kms. from Palayur, is the most spectacular temple festival with its fireworks and its procession of caparisoned elephants and thundering drums.[6] The work of carpenters and goldsmiths of the Kodungallur - Palayur belt has won international acclaim. The Elephant Enclave at Guruvayur near Palayur is an international attraction.

Contacts with the Outer World

Kerala boasts of a rich tradition and a deep historical background. People from far off lands have found their way to Kerala since ancient times. The coast was familiar country to the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Chinese long before Vasco da Gama arrived in 1498 A.D. References to Kerala and the Malabar Coast harbours and their exports aboud in Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.), the Periplus (90 A.D.), etc.[7] The state also boasts a political first being the first place in the free world outside the Iron and Bamboo Curtains to have elected a Communist Government during the free elections of 1957.

Nature's Bounty

In Kerala from end to end you see lush green coconut palms, shimmering lagoons, palm-fringed canals, breaking rarely, only to give way to the serene backwaters and finally to that vast body of endless water, the Arabian Sea. Kerala soothes a traveller with her turquoise blue beaches, soothing shades of palm

trees, green lowlands, sky scraping mountains, placid lakes and some of the most picture-perfect natural resources in the world. Kerala, the incredibly enchanting God's Own Country is believed to have been created when the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu named Parashurama, bids adieu to his arms, asking forgiveness for his sins, threw his axe from the North which landed on Southern India to form this narrow verdant strip of land surrounded by the rolling hills of the Western Ghats providing the cardamom, pepper, turmeric and ginger, making Kerala the spice garden of India.

The towering Sahyadri mountain ranges cut off Kerala from the rest of India. Kerala the land itself is associated with legends, which reveal a rich and beguiling culture extremely well depicted in its distinctive forms of dance, drama and temple arts, with travellers and missionaries from different parts of the world touching its coast and leaving their marks. Thus Kerala has a very cosmopolitan history graced by visitors like St. Thomas the Apostle who landed here in 52 AD, Syrian Christian settlers from across the sea whose cathedrals and churches still attract large congregations throughout the state, and Vasco da Gama who landed near Calicut in 1498. Christians, Muslims and Jews all found a welcome in Kerala, as did the early Phoenician, Greek and Roman traders. There are old temples , churches, and mosques aplenty.There is also a synagogue built in 1568 in Cochin, reflecting a small but significant Jewish presence. "In ancient Kerala this type of relationship is found to have existed in the case of heterogenous

religio-cultural groups like Hinduism, Jainism, Budhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam."[8]

Today Kerala, with 100 per cent literacy rate, is one of the most advanced states in India, with the physical quality of life comparable with the developed nations. However, in spite of the deep and lasting impressions left by all the settlers, the original inhabitants never surrendered their individual identity or passionate awareness of their own culture.

Visitors' Accounts

The glory of Kerala has lured travellers and ' 'aders in the past. They drank Malabar to their heart's content and left behind remarkable accounts of its past. To quote a few who were in Kerala in the last eight centuries: [9]

Marco Polo in his Book of Travels (1292 AD)

"When you leave the Islands of Seilan and sail westwards about sixty miles, you come to the great province of Malabar, which is styled India the greater. It is the best of all the Indus and is on the main land... There is in the kingdom a great quantity of pepper and ginger and cinnamon and nuts of India."

Sheik Ibn Batuta (1342-47 AD)

"We next come to Kalikat, one of the great ports of the district of Malabar and in which merchants from all parts are found... "They put a thief to death for stealing a single nut or even a seed of any fruit, hence thieves are unknown among them... The greatest part of the Mohammedan merchants of this place are so wealthy that one of them can purchase

the whole freightage of such vessels as put in here."

Abdu-r-Razzak (1442 AD)

"Such security and justice reign in Malabar that rich merchants bring to it from maritime countries large cargoes of merchandise which they disembark and deposit in the streets and market places and for a length of time leave it without consigning it to any one's charge or placing it under any guard."

Lord William Bentick (1804)

"There was one point in regard to the character of the inhabitants of Malabar, on which all authorities, however diametrically opposed to each other on other points, agreed and that was with regard to the 'independence of mind' of the inhabitants. This 'independence of mind' was generally diffused through the 'minds of the people'."

William Logan (1887)

"Some of the more remarkable of the vegetable and animal productions of the Malabar coast have been known to western nations from times antecedent to the Christian era, and have been the objects of maritime enterprise and commerce through all the succeeding centuries."

Significance of Geographical, Numismatic, and Demographic Data

A good deal of space has been utilised to look at the geographical aspects and physical features of Kerala in general and of the Palayur - Kodungallur - (Muziris)- Parur area very close to the sea coast of the former Cochin State, as well as its religious and

cultural background because an understanding of these factors is essential for the proper evaluation of the story of Palayur, and because in many of the standard books on Kerala church history such factors have not generally been given sufficient importance. These factors will have a bearing on almost all aspects of the history and culture of the St. Thomas Christians - all the places, the churches, the events and situations connected with these Christians. This river and backwaters linked area is the oldest in folk memory, and which had very close tradelinks with the Egyptian, Arabic, and Roman worlds in the first century B.C. / A.D.[10] How the backwaters and river systems leading from Palayur - Chettuva area to Muziris (Kodungallur) and to the Arabian sea led to the prosperity of Palayur and how it attracted foreigners is evident from the treasure-trove discovered near Palayur at Eyyal in 1945 containing large numbers of 1st Century B.C. / A.D. Roman gold and silver coins including those of Augustus, Tiberius, Nero & c. For descriptions and photos of these see the two publications- from Trivandrum - of the Dept. of Archaeology, Govt. of Kerala: 'Early Coins of Kerala' by Gupta, and 'Roman Gold Coins of Kerala' by Satyamoorthi.

Palayur has as its boundaries Guruvayur on the North, Orumanayur on the South, Pavaratty on the East, and the Arabian Sea on the West. Kochi (Cochin or Cochim) is 70 Kms. to the South and Thrissur (Trichur or Thrisivaperur) is 25 Kms. to the East.

The Palayur - Guruvayur - Kodungallur - Muziris-Parur geological plate has been described as the largest

and most intact geological plate by the concerned Government departments, making it necessary to look for the oldest continuous population centres of Kerala in its vicinity. Large number of Christian families in old Travancore trace their origin to Palayur-Koungalur-Muziris-Parur.

Demographic reverse projection would indicate that the population of the whole of Kerala was at the most one or two lakhs in the first century, and as such if the Apostle's efforts were all that successful as tradition would have it, the vast majority of Kerala's and Palayur's 1st century population must have accepted 'the religion of grace' preached by St. Thomas.

Palayur: One of Three Extant Churches of Apostolic Origin

In Kerala itself we have strong traditions about seven locations where churches or Christian communities were established probably by Apostle St. Thomas himself. Six of these seven churches are very near the sea or a backwater. Unfortunately nothing much perhaps remains or could be precisely deciphered today of the churches at Kodungallur, Chayal / Nilakkal, or Quilon. While traditionally St. Thomas himself had a share in the re-erection of the Cross at Niranam - the Cross that was thrown into the river at Thrikkapileswaram, the Kokkamangalam Cross thrown into the backwaters was re-erected by a local Christian at Pallippuram. Hence, technically, only three of the original seven churches, viz, the Parur church in the Syro-Malabar Archdiocese of Ernakulam, the Palayur church in the Syro-Malabar

Archdiocese of Trichur, and the Niranam church under the Orthodox Syrian Church (Devalokam Aramana) could claim a continuous existence from the time of their establishment by the Apostle in the middle of the first century after Christ.

Origins of the Christian Community at Palayur

The Christians of Palayur trace their origin to the preaching of St. Thomas the Apostle of Christ at Palayur, early in the second half of the first century A.D. The Apostle's visit and activities are thus described by the author of the Ramban Song:

"....., he travelled to the north,
And thus in the space of a fortnight he reached the village of Palur,
In those parts also he preached the religion for a year. During that time,
He baptised one thousand and fifty persons." [11]

Planting of the Cross

After baptising the people of Palayur the Apostle also made sure that they were properly trained in matters liturgical. To that end
".....Thereafter,
In order that they all might perform all the rites of worship, There he set up a Cross of beautiful form." [12]

The Thomas Event at Palayur in Kerala Tradition

Many other details of the work of St. Thomas at Palayur are available from Kerala tradition and folklore and in works like 'Ancient Wedding Songs'.

The following is a typical version of what happened at Palayoor during the first encounter of the Apostle with the local people, as universally attested to in Kerala tradition:

"When Thomas came to the great Brahmin centre of Palayur, a leading Brahmin *Gramam* among the 64, he came across some Brahmins doing the *Pithru Yajna* or *Pooja* to the manes or ghosts of deceased ancestors. They were throwing water into the air (*Tharpanam*) while reciting *Manthras*. The Apostle learned from them the meaning of this ritual and remarked: 'If your performance is acceptable to the gods they could keep the water suspended in the air without allowing it to fall down again and again'.

"The Brahmins said that this was unthinkable as it was opposed to the laws of nature. Then Thomas asserted that the One true God he worshipped could do it, and he proceeded to perform a miracle on condition that the Brahmins accept his faith if he is successful. The Apostle, invoking the Holy Trinity, made the sign of the Cross and threw a handful of water up into the sky. After reaching a particular height the water stood still in the air, the particles glittering like diamonds. Looking down the Brahmins could see the cavity made by the removal of the water still there in the pond. Most of the witnesses were baptised on the spot. However those Brahmins who did not accept the faith called the place 'Shapa Kadu' or Cursed Place and left the place immediately promising to take the next bath only at Vembanattu, unpolluted by the new faith. Even today, true to the oath taken by their ancestors, the Brahmins do not

Family Names

"The Apostle must have given the same organisation to the churches that he established in India as the other apostles did. According to the Ramban Song, he ordained priests and consecrated bishops. Kepa and Paul are said to have been consecrated bishops. Two families, Sankarapuri and Pakalomattam, even today claim a continual line of priests starting from those ordained by the Apostle." [18]

The two families Sankarapuri and Pakalomattam were among those who received their faith from Apostle Thomas at Palayur. As Placid Podipara also says, "There is a tradition that St. Thomas conferred priesthood and also high priesthood on the members of certain fmilies some of which, as we said above, exist even today glorying in a line of priests, going back, as it is said, to St. Thomas."[19]

"Pakalomattam and some others (as we said) are some of these families. In Malabar families often take their original names from the compounds where they live in. The descendants of Pakalomattam and of some other families are found at Kuravilangad. The tradition is that they immigrated to Kuravilangad from far away Palayur in the early centuries. In Palayur could be seen even today compounds bearing these names. All these show how sedulously the Thomas Christians keep up their traditions." [20] Some other families tracing their Christian origin to the Palayur event are : Kalli, Kaliyankavu, Kottakkali, Koyikkam, Nedumpalli, Panakkamattam, Madamboor, Muttodan....although the most famous

examples are those of Sankarapuri and Pakalomattam which have contributed to the Kerala Church some of its best known leaders, priests, and administrators.[21]

Personal Names

L.K. Anantha Krishna Aiyar the reputed anthropologist testifies in his Anthropology of the Syrian Christians [22] that the Malayalam dialect or colloquial language of the Syrian Christians of the Thrissur district (not necessarily of the Thrissur town, perhaps) is the language spoken by the Kerala Brahmins or Namboodiris at home. The personal names prevalent among the Christians of the area are also names or very similar to the names to be found among the Namboodiries or Malayalee Brahmins of the area.

Names like Kunjethy, Ittiannam, Cherchi, Unicharu are very common for Christian women. Ittiachan, Thomakkutty and Thomman, Varunny, Kurian, Kochappan, Oppan are popular male names.[The Greek and Biblical elements in the Chistian names of the locality harks back to a time much before the advent of any foreign domination in the area : Rodha, Alexander (Chandy), Pathros (Peter), Yohannan, Martha, Mariam, are examples.[23] The name of the vicar of the church in the Palayur copper plate No.1 of 1606 A.D. is Ittyachanar. During the time of the third and fourth copper plates the name of the vicar is given as Chakku(=James, Jacob).[24]

Jews were continuously coming to see the church, more out of curiosity than from devotion."[30] Although Tippu Sultan's army set fire to the church in the 18th century so that it had to be reconstructed it is believed that the nave of the present church belongs to Fr. Fenicio's building. The statement of the missionary shows that Jews were present at Palayur at least till the beginning of the 17th century.

The Jews in Palayur

There is a strong belief that St. Thomas was first attracted to Kerala by the presence of Jews here, and that his first fields of work were in the Jewish colonies of 1st century Kerala.[31] There is another point of view that Jews arrived in Kerala only after the fall of Jerusalem in 69 A.D.[32] It is certain that even if there were no Jewish settlements in Palayur before the coming of the Apostle there has been a very strong presence of Jews there from soon after that. According to Moses Pereya de Paiva there were in Palayur one synagogue and ten families of Jews in 1686. The Juden Kunnu (hill) of old records now termed the Jewish Bazar at Palayur is a living testimony to the presence and prominence of Jews there in the early centuries. The area at the foot of this spot is still called Angadythazham, which could be translated as the place at the foot of the (Jewish) bazar or hill. There is mention of a Jewish flute-girl in connection with the story of St.Thomas' arrival in Kerala, and also mention of the Apostle converting forty Jews. But the Knanaya community of 'Jewish Christians' in Kerala trace their origin not to St. Thomas the Apostle, but to Thomas Kinayi only.

The Bishop of Palayur

The importance and stature of Palayur among the Thomas Christian churches is evident from the fact that Palayur was chosen as the episcopal seat of the first indigenous Metran or Bishop. Although there is an element of uncertainty or mystery surrounding some of the facts concerning the appointment of Archdeacon George of Christ as the bishop of Palayur, Pope Gregory XIII in his letter to the clergy and the Christians of St. Thomas has this: "Obedite vero in Domino Abrahamo Archiepiscopo vestro, Georgio item Episcopo Palurensi..."[33] This question is elaborately discussed, and is the theme of the book by Jacob Manjooran also.[34] Discussions on this are also to be found in Mackenzie, Panjikkaren, Placid , Thekkedath[35] and many others. The Archdeacon's consecration could have prevented many untoward incidents in the history of the Kerala Church.

Places and Objects of Interest

There are in Palayur today a number of places and objects worthy of the historian's, the tourist's, and the pilgrim's interest. In the preservation, protection, and conservation of these and in bringing to popular attention the significance of Palayur, many persons and organisations have rendered yeoman service. A few of these names may be recalled here, although space does not permit a detailed narration of the multifarious services contributed by each: The vicars Frs. G.F.Choondal, J.Manjooran, V.S.Arakkal,...the first vice-chairman of the Palayur Development Committee Retd. District and Sessions Judge C.J.Devassy were some who during their lifetime

worked hard for the progress of this pilgrim centre.

Because of its historical importance, the church has been upgraded as Archdiocesan Shrine on 16 April 2000, by the Archbishop of Trichur Mar Jacob Thumkuzhy. To-day Palayur is a major Pilgrim Center, attracting hundreds of people everyday from all over the state of Kerala and also from other states and countries. Recently (27th Aug., 2000) relics of the Apostle Thomas have been brought from Ortona in Italy and deposited in the artistically made casket by the efforts of Archbishop Thumkuzhy.

Among the noteworthy historical monuments at Palayur are the Boat Jetty (*Bottukulam*) where St Thomas landed at Palayur, the *Thaliyakulam* or pond where St Thomas baptized the local people, a replica of Chinna Malai (of Mylapore - Madras) where St Thomas attained martyrdom in AD 72, the historical remnants of an old Aryan temple, the Historical and Cultural Museum, the 14 scenes from the life of St Thomas sculpted in granite, and the Jubilee Door in front of the entrance of the main hall of the church, depicting various important Biblical events, carved in Burmese teak.

The historical museum has many objects of archaeological, historical, and artistic value. Among the objects registered with / by the State Dept. of Archaeology are many ancient objects of historical value. The Christian Cultural Museum functioning in the Lourdes Cathedral premises from 1980, which had collected together a large number of objects of historic, artistic, archival, archaeological, and anthropological interest in granite, wood, metal, ivory &c. from old

non-Catholic as well as Catholic churches spread all over the state, was trasferred to Palayur in the early nineties. The Archdiocesan commission for the Palayur Pilgrim Centre has recently made elaborate plans for its all round development, keeping intact its cultural and spiritual heritage, and the Archdiocesan Committee for Palayur is now putting some of these plans into practice. A three storeyed edifice for the museum has been completed and the objects from Palayur as well as the large collection made by the present writer for the Christian Cultural Museum of the Trichur Cathedral are being scientifically displayed.

Festivals and Celebrations

The Palayur Pilgrim Centre today attracts, as has been mentioned, large numbers of non-Christians also. This has always been the case. The following incident is taken from the Jesuit annual letter of 1607:

Two kinglets, having in vain appealed to their idols, made vows in this church (at Palur) with the object of getting an heir. God heard them. One determined to feed 500 or 1,000 of the faithful. The second called about 4,000.[36]

The following are some of the festivals, celebrations, and rituals observed at Palayur: special services on every Tuesday, Muppittu Njayar celebration on Sundays after the tenth of every month with baptism of children from all over the archdiocese and state at the Thaliakkulam (tank), community *Vratharamba* service on ash Monday, vidyaramba service every year, Dukhrana (July 3), First Sunday

after Easter, etc.

The most interesting event at Palayur nowadays is the Palayur *Mahatheerthadanam* or Great Pilgrimage under Archdiocesan auspices during the lenten season, on what has come to be known as Palayur Sunday i.e. the Sunday before Palm Sunday, in which thousands of devotees participate irrespective of caste and creed.

Notes :

1. Cf. article by Narendra Pani, The Economic Times, 13, Oct. 2000. "Sarsangachalak Mr. Sudarshan's call to develop swadeshi Churches will add oil to the fire of controversies and troubles. It is a consistent ideology of the Sangh to mix religion with nationalism. The RSS would prefer a church of India as in the case of Britain's Church of England. The idea may not be palatable to Indian Christians. In the event of Christians rejecting the demand, the RSS can question their nationalist crendentials. That would give an opportunity to mobilize Hindus. But the RSS has limitations in building such a movement on negative sentiments."

2. For the latest position among scholars on this cf. papers by Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan, Dr. Veluthat Kesavan &c. at the Seminar on the Namboothiries, the Jews, and the Sangham Literature held at Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, 2000. From the beginning of the second millennium A.D. there has been a continuous attempt to glorify the achievements and attributes of Nampoothiries in Kerala. From the middle of the 19th century, with Nair ascendancy, many books have been written emphasising the achievements of Nairs, who were as Sudras duty bound until recently to serve the other three castes. Finally today there is a proliferation of works on Dalit primacy.

3. Some come from the 'Today' Magazine of Manila, Philippines, reproduced by the Indian Embassy. More details may be found in any standard book on Kerala history. Cf. the opening chapter

by Menachery, in Kodungallur: City of St. Thomas, *Azhikode, 1987 or its revised version* Kodungallur: The Cradle of Christianity in India, *Kodungallur, 2000 for additional references. Read part of this publication at http:// www.indianchristianity.com.*

4. K.P.P. Menon, History of Kerala, *Vol.I, Ernakulam, 1924, p.76.*

5. M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, *Calicut,1972, p.vii.*

6. Toby Sinclair, India, *The Guidebook Company, 1995, p.212.*

7. Menachery & Chakkalakkal, Kodungallur..., *Notes, pp.19-23 where references to more than a dozen authors / works are provided.*

8. M. G. S. Narayanan, op. cit., ibid.

9. All quoted by McKibben, op.cit.

10.Cf. references to K. P. Padmanabha Menon, Nagam Aiya, Velu Pillai, K.M.Panikkar, Galletti and Groot, Col. Yule, Erakkaddur Thyankannanar, Paranar, Vincent Smith, Bjorn Landstorm, K.V. Krishna Iyer, and others in Kodungallur.... *cited above.*

11. Translation by T.K.Joseph (6-7/3/1926) published by Rev.H. Hosten, 1931. Reprinted in The Indian Church History Classics, *Vol. I,* The Nazranies, *(Ed.) Prof. George Menachery, Ollur, 1998, (hereafter* ICHC-I*), p.521.*

12. Id., ibid.

13. V.C.George, 'The Seven Churches of St. Thomas,' in The St.Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, *Vol.II, Trichur, 1973, (Ed.) George Menachery (hereafter* STCEI-II*), pp. 180-181. Alias* The Thomapedia, *(Ed.) Prof. George Menachery, Ollur - Thrissur City, 2000 (hereafter* Thomapedia*), p. 180 r.colm. F,G, p.181 l.colm. A. For the traditions about the church and community at Palayur the following three books and an article all in Malayalam will be found useful: 1. Fr. Jacob Manjooran B.A.,* Palayoorile Niyuktha Metran *(The Bishop*

Designate of Palayur), Vellikkulangara, 1981. 2. Fr. V. S. Arakkal, Thomasleehayude Padamudrakal *(Footprints of Apostle Thomas), Poonkunnam, 1991. 3. Jos Chittilappilly,* Palayur Palli *(Palayur Church), Palayur, 1997. 4. Prof. C. L. Anthony, article on the Palayur Copper Plates in his* Bhasha Padhanamgal. *The present writer remembers with pleasure the many hours spend by him in the company of all these writers discussing the Palayur Church and planning its development. With Prof. Anthony the discussions often spread into many other areas of church history, Christian contribution to Malayalam language and literature, and the state of the Church in Kerala. A fourth book on Palayur which must have been mentioned first is in English, Fr. Placid's* St.Thomas and the Church of Palayur, *Choondal, 1951.*

14. Cf. Jos Chittilappilly, op. cit., p.12. Also in many other works. Chittilappilly ably attempts 'to shed light on the auspicious moments in the history of Palayur'.

15. Id., ibid.

16. Cf. Placid, C.M.I., op.cit. A. C. Perumalil, s.j., in his Apostles in India, *p.69; and in f.n.201 on the same page: Ptolemy, 7.1. 8, 85; McCrindle, 49, 180. Also 'Travellers and Historians', Malayalam, Velayudhan Panikkassery, Engandiyoor, 1971, p.54,* Palayur (in Ptolemy).

17. M.E.=Malayalam Era which is the new Quilon Era or Kolla Varsham. To obtain M.E. year deduct 825 from the A.D. The beginning of the M.E. is believed to be closely connected with the second major Syrian immigration associated with Sapir Iso & c. For the Palayur copper plates, published in The Travancore Archaeological Series *at the instance of Fr. Hosten, s.j., vide the excellent study on these by Prof. C. L. Anthony in his* Bhasha Padhanamgal. *Also see Chittilappilly, op. cit., pp.27, 28. The four sets of plates are now kept at the Palayur Museum.*

18. Varkey Vithayathil in article "Mission and Life of St. Thomas in India," STCEI II, *1973, p.5, r. colm. (alias* Thomapedia, *2000, p.5 >CD).*

19. STCEI II, *p.10, r. colm., alias* Thomapedia, *p.10, >G.*

20. Id., note2 46, p.12.

21. Such as Archdeacon Geevarghese of Jesus, Archdeacon Geevarghese of the Cross, Archdeacon Thoma (Mar Thoma I), Bishop Parambil Chandy (Alexander de Campos), Chavara Kuriakos Elias, Fr. Geevarghese Sankoorikal and many others. For family names in Palayur and present day compound names there see Podipara, 'The Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas', in 'The Thomas Christians' alias STCEI II, *1973, p.8. r.colm.*

22. Ernakulam, 1926. See extracts from the work in ICHC I , *1998,* The Nazranies*'.*

23. Joseph Kolengaden, 'Culture and Traditions of the Thomas Christians', STCEI II, *1973, pp.127-131. Also Alexander Cherukarakkunnel, 'Indianisation Among Thomas Christians', id., pp.174-177.*

24. Here it may be very interesting to note that the most common name among Thomas Christian men is or was Geevarghese (George), Kurian (Cyriac), and Thoma (Thomas). What is even more surprising (or is it that surprising) is that the commonest name in England was that of the father of the Indian Church Thomas while the name most pupular in Kerala is the name of the patron saint of England.(Based on the findings of the writer during a research stint in the British Museum, 1975 vide Pallikkalakalum Mattum *(Mal.), 1984;* Kodungallur: City of...*,1987 etc.) It is believed that statues were introduced in Kerala churches from the time of the Synod of Diamper and a statue of Kuriakose Sahada was placed in the Palayur church and the church came to be known in the name of that saint from then on. Until recently the diocesan records of Trichur were designating the Palayur church under that name.*

25. Just 4 or 5 miles from Palayur.

26. Travancore State Manual, *Vol.II, pp. 22, 123, Trivandrum, 1906. Quoted by Panjikkaran, op. cit., ibid. It could be that the Nazraney women in other areas gave up these customs as a result*

of westernisation and modernisation.

27. There are many texts which support the view that other castes could get converted into Brahmins under various circumstances and certain conditions vide V. S. Arakkal, op. cit. Appendix 1, pp.1ff. But see M.G.S. Narayanan quoted in Essay One, above.

28. K.P.Soundara Rajan, (sometime Director General, Archaeological Survey of India), in South Indian Sculpture. *In the table givin by him for Thonda Mandalam, Chola Mandalam, Pandi Mandalam, and Kongu - Chera Nadu, Hindu sculptures appear latest in the last mentioned territory, mostly after the 10th century.*

29. Panjikkaran, op. cit., ibid.

30. Thomapedia, *Minor Articles, p.212; A. Zaleski,* The Saints of India, *Mangalore, 1915, p.25; Chittilappilly. op. cit., p.19; Cherukarakkunnel,* STCEI II, *p.176.; Ferroli I, etc.*

31. Thomas Puthiakunnel, 'Jewish Colonies of India Paved the Way for St. Thomas', in 'The Malabar Church', alias STCEI II, *pp.26-27. Here Puthiakunnel traces the Jewish contacts with Kerala from the time of King Solomon onwards. Articles by S.Koder and others in the Cochin Synagogue 400th Year Commemoration Volume, Cochin, ca.1968 has much useful material.*

32. S. Koder in STCEI II, *'History of the Jews of Kerala', 1973 gives the various versions of scholars about the beginnings of Kerala's Jewish connection.*

33.George Cathanar, The Orthodoxy of the St. Thomas Christians, *Kottayam, 1904 , SARAS reprint* ICHC I, *p.158. Also on p.150 XIX (=XXX) this letter is described: "The same Pope Gregory XIII. directs a letter dated 5th March 1580, to the clergy and laity of the Christians of St. Thomas....exhorting to be obedient to their Prelates Mar Abraham the Archbishop of Angamale and George of Christ the Bishop of Palur". Further read under XXXI on p.158: "It must be observed here that, though the election of the Archdeacon George as the Bishop of*

Palur was confirmed by the Chaldean Patriarch (vide letter of Mar Abraham to Pope Gregory XIII in Documents here) and approved by the Pope, he was not consecrated." The reasons are here mentioned.

34. Palayurile Niyuktha Metran *(Bishop Designate of Palayur), Vellikkulangara, 1981*

35. In the case of the first three cf. works reprinted in The Nazranies *i.e.,* ICHC I. *For Thekkedath,* History of Christianity in India, *Vol. II, Ed. A.M.Mudadan, B'lore, 1982, p. 31. "In 1566 Patriarch Abdisho authorised Mar Abraham to ordain him (George of Christ) bishop of Palur and suffragan and successor to Mar Abraham. Mar Abraham too wanted this. Both he and the Jesuit fathers wrote to Rome about it. Pope Gregory XIII confirmed this nomination by his brief "Accepimus quod", issued on 4 March 1580.(G.Beltrami,* La Chiesa Caldeo, *pp.196-7). But the archdeacon who, out of humility, had previously declined this honour was not consecrated even after the papal confirmation. This was a real pity. If an indigenous line of bishops had started at this time, the St.Thomas Christian community would have been spared many unnecessary troubles and unfortunate divisions." - p.59.*

36. Thekkedath quotes this, op. cit., p.139. The Kunnamkulangara incident reported by Fr. Campori may be read along with this, id., ibid.

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Essay One

Papers presented by Prof. Menachery at the Satna Diocesan Jubilee Seminar 1999; World Syriac Conference 2001 (printed in the *HARP*, Kottayam; in the *Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, Rajkot, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2004 pp. 33-42; in the *Light of Life*, New York, N.Y.).

Essay Two

Papers by the author at Tamil Nadu Numismatic Society Conferences (Madras and Karur); the South Indian Numismatic Society Conferences (Thrissur, Veliyanad, and Kanyakumari); the World Syriac Conference 1998; (printed in the *HARP*, SEERI, Kottayam, Vol. XIII, 2000, pp. 21-27; the *Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, Rajkot, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2003, pp. 29-37; the *Light of Life*)

Essay Three

Paper originally presented by Prof. Menachery at the LREC Seminar in connection with the inauguration of the St. Thomas Christian Museum, Kakkand, Ernakulam, November, 2001. Published in various journals including the *HARP*, XV, 2002, pp. 129-136.

Essay Four

Papers by Prof. Menachery at the First World Malayalam Conference, 1977; Societas Liturgica Congress, 1999; Jeevass National Seminar, *Poorna 2004*, Alwaye, 2004; LRC Seminar, Kakkanad, October, 2004;

Calicut University National Seminar, 2002; his paper on " Possibilities of further Inculturation:Music, Art, Architecture," LREC seminar, January, 2004; paper in the *HARP*, XVI, 2003, pp. 279-284; article in "Christian Contribution to Nation Building", CBCI-KCBC 2004; Rashtra Deepika Millennium Directory, 2000 &c.

Essay Five

Originally published in the *Journal of the St. Thomas Christians* , Rajkot, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2001, pp. 60-76; reprinted variously.

The publishers have also used the Professor's articles in the *Mathrubhoomi* Weekly (1978), the *Malayala Manorama* Sunday Edition, and in the *Hindu*, the *Indian Express*, the *Express* (Malayalam), the *Deepika* etc. in finalising these essays and end notes.

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